DISCIPLINING ‘SPORTS GEOGRAPHY’; RE-CREATING GEOGRAPHIES OF
FITNESS, PLACE AND THE BODY AT THE KENT STATE UNIVERSITY
STUDENT RECREATION AND WELLNESS CENTER

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Chapter 1

Introduction: “You’re The Best Around, Nothing’s Ever Gonna Keep You Down”

“What is sport? Sport answers this question by another question: who is best? But to this question of the ancient duels, sport gives a new meaning: for man’s excellence is sought here only in relation to things. Who is the best man to overcome the resistance of things, the immobility of nature? Who is the best to work the world, to give it to men . . . all men? That is what sport says. […] What is sport? What is it then that men put into sport? Themselves, their human universe. Sport is made in order to speak the human contract.” – Roland Barthes (2007)

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“Slow and steady wins the race.” – Aesop’s Fables

There can be no doubt that there are a great number of mixed expectations regarding this project given the amount of time it has taken to complete; many of them are my own. I began this project in the spring of 2008 as an overzealous, stubborn graduate student who expected to write a dissertation-like-book without the experience or expertise of knowing how to do it. Four years later, I still don’t think I do, but what I do know is that the research process is a lived experience. As an athlete and as an academic, I have spent most of my life trying to be the best, and I have often been caught up running too far ahead. I don’t mean to dwell on my personal experiences, but I bring up the importance of performance because in sport, fitness and recreation, the desire to be the best – to achieve – is at odds with experience. Too often, as individuals, we get caught up in the performance and appearance of our bodies, our abilities, and our place in the world that we ignore how our social practices are a detriment not only to ourselves
but to the experience of others. It is this thought that led me to this research project in the first place.

This thesis set out to answer one primary question, but in the course of doing the project, I realized there was more to discuss than I initially realized. In the beginning, I simply wanted to add to the development of sports geography which is in part why the title of the thesis is Disciplining Sports Geography because I literally wanted to make the discipline of geography more aware of how important this sub-field could be. When I started towards this project, I framed my initial research on my own experiences in childhood of being excluded on the playground so I looked to starting a youth-oriented research project. However, after this project fell apart due to time constraints and other restricting circumstances, I decided to focus on the ways exclusion occurred at the Kent State University Student Recreation and Wellness Center. The basis of this research was, again primarily based in my own experience, but also from my interest in feminist perspectives on sport and space. Notably, my research agenda started from the work of Lynda Johnston (1998) who provided the two questions central to my framework:

“why and in what ways are the environments of fitness centres sexed spaces?” (244)
“how and in what ways do the sexed spaces of fitness centres construct bodies feminine and/or masculine? (245)

Although she developed her work on the basis of female bodybuilders, I expanded my project in a different direction focusing on college students. While this thesis ultimately resembles next to nothing of her work in its final form, I would be remiss not to recognize how her questions influenced this piece and the chapters ahead. This is a study
of how geographies of exclusion and gender performance occur at the Kent State University Student Recreation and Wellness Center.

In chapter two, I detail a series of short narratives employing the methodological technique of auto-ethnography. The purpose of this is to provide background and positioning to the overall structure of my thesis, but also to explain how this project is linked to my own personal experiences with sports and recreation. Although I consider this part of the project a methods piece, it can also be considered as a pre-literature review in its own right because it represents a discussion of ‘lived’ theory, if you will. That is to say, it explains not only my interest in the project, but how I chose to structure it in the context of feminism and youth geographies. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion of my research questions.

In chapter three, I perform an historical literature review that explains how my theoretical perspective developed from my experiences in becoming a geographer, how I came to understand theories of space and place, and how I envisioned the project taking shape. This chapter primarily focuses on how sports geography traces its lineage to regional geography and humanist geographies, how I feel it can be improved upon by feminist geographies and other critical social theories, and also why I think it fits into youth geographies. Finally, I conclude the chapter by detailing how theory will be used in my analysis.

In chapter four, I explain my primary methodologies used in this project which include participant observation and interviews. I also discuss the problems I had in creating this project from the ground up, the troubles I encountered trying to work with
young people, and ultimately how I reshaped the project following several setbacks in the field. This chapter also contains a rationale for performing a feminist-oriented research project as a male observer. Finally, the chapter concludes by linking back to the theory and research questions and explains how my data impacted my analysis.

In chapter five, I begin my analysis by discussing how sports geography’s founding theorist, John Bale, details his explanation for using a theoretical standpoint he calls critical humanism. Then in this context, I detail the ways that critical humanism through Bale’s sports geography calls on major geographical works on exclusion including Sibley (1995) and Creswell (1996). Next, I argue that while Bale’s theory of critical humanism and place is an adequate way to discuss sports geography in the context of my general observations of the Kent State University Student Recreation and Wellness Center, it lacks a touchstone with the way exclusion actually plays out. From here, I proceed to discuss how the work of Michel Foucault (1995) which has been touched on by a number of other scholars provides a more nuanced explanation of geographies of fitness. From this research, I base my analysis on Foucault’s concept of discipline in order to analyze my interviewees’ responses. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of five themes that emerged from my interview data.

Throughout the course of this thesis, I have referenced a number of my personal experiences and have maintained a strong personal connection to this research. At times, I struggled with the project and although it took me nearly four years to complete, much of the work was performed in a matter of weeks and months set years apart. I spend some time reflecting on this situation in my conclusion as well as arguing for continued
development of critical sports geographies and offer a potential research direction for the expansion of this project.
Chapter 2

Personal History, Auto-ethnographic Narrative and Research Questions

“Although I was never a successful athlete (by whatever criterion ‘success’ is measured) I think I can identify with the world of elite athletes, partly because I dreamed of being one, partly because I read voraciously about them, partly because (at my own modest level) I behaved like them, and partly because I met and knew some of them.” – John Bale (2004: 5)

Introduction

While the theoretical framework for this project discussed in the next chapter expresses my experiences of becoming a geographer, an equally important part of this research rests on my personal history and how my other life experiences outside of the academy have influenced the way I interpret geographic thought. In that regard, I have adopted Aitken and Valentine’s (2006) argument that philosophies are ‘ways of knowing’ that “comprise theories, or sets of theories, which seek to answer questions about what the world must be like for knowledge to be possible” (5). However, these ways of knowing are complicated by the theories we use to approach our research because they are neither “impartial or neutral but, rather, they are instruments of persuasion based on our experience” (6).

A life-long personal involvement in sports, recreation and fitness activities have come to constitute much of my spatial, gender and sexual identities. To explain how these experiences have helped me to develop the research questions that drive this project, I employ the use of an auto-ethnographic method in this chapter suggested by Sparkes
(2002), Markula and Denison (2005) and Jones (2008). Sparkes (2002) explains that auto-ethnographic writing is a generative process that recognizes the importance of an author or researcher’s background on the development and explication of a current research topic. This methodology is performed because it “provide[s] access to the multiple subjectivities of social life and a range of embodied feelings, emotions, and reactions to others” (99) and offers “challenges to conventional ways of writing and knowing about the social world” (89). Furthermore, as an alternative, and ultimately transgressive, ‘way of doing’ research, the author of an auto-ethnography is not merely recognizing their position in the research, they are expressly describing through a self-narrative an important series of experiences which have influenced their “way of knowing” about the world. “With this data collection method, the researcher usually begins by thinking of moments that have in one way or another been influential in his or her choice of a research topic and the formation of specific research questions” (Markula and Denison 2005).

Narratives of these experiences do not simply describe the past in some sort of objective recollection of facts, but instead are a “telling to confer meaning on prior events—events that may not have had such meaning at the time. This is the narrative transposition of Kierkegaard’s famous statement that we live life forwards but understand it backwards” (Josselson 1995: 35). Additionally, because the author of auto-ethnographic writing does not have to worry about the common concern of misrepresenting the meaning of other individuals’ experiences through narrative analysis, they are capable of providing an even more in-depth interpretation of the past as they
know it currently. However, this does not provide absolute freedom in presenting personal experiences. Auto-ethnographic writing requires that the author “be aware that their writing can become self-indulgent and masturbatory rather than self-knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, or self-luminous” (Sparkes 2002: 90). Therefore, what I present here is not a story about my life (i.e. an autobiography) (Ellis 2004); rather it is a description of those particular experiences of sports recreation activities during my life-course which express why I am concerned with the particular topics of youth, gender, sport and belonging discussed in this thesis. I, thus, echo Jones’ (2008) comments about her own auto-ethnographic writing and want to suggest that “[t]his chapter is meant for public display, for an audience. […] It is a performance that asks how our personal accounts count” (206).

Self-Narrative I: Learning the ‘social’ in and through youth sports

I can’t remember when I first started playing sports, nor do I remember much of a social life as a youth where I wasn’t engaged in some sort of physical activity whether I was part of a sports team, running around on the playground or exploring the woods behind my best friend’s house. What I do remember, however, is that most of the social interaction with my peers as a child was split into organized sport and recreation activities mediated by adult supervision and seemingly unorganized ‘play’ involving games of some kind developed in the backyards and playgrounds without interference by adults. In thinking about it now though, even these games involved a structure that determined rules for the appropriate social, spatial and temporal behavior. It seemed
almost second nature growing up that I should play sports because there was little else to do in my poor rural village in southwestern Ohio. Yet, not only did I play sports, but I watched them on television, too. While this may not seem like an abnormal activity for most children, it is telling of how much of my life – as well as the life of others – revolved around an emphasis on the development of a sporting body.

Starting sometime around 1st grade, I remember that I played little league baseball and soccer. My dad was always my coach and because of the politics of small town life, the fact that he wasn’t a ‘home-grown’ local meant he always received the worst players which meant I was always on the worst teams. In fact, from what my father has told me, the other little league baseball team coaches thought it would be funny to give my dad the only differently-abled kid (referred to here-on as Davey) in the whole town. I remember feeling my dad’s frustration at the fact that other teams would take advantage of Davey when he was batting, intentionally aiming to hit him on occasion, but I remember even more vividly how good it felt to vicariously experience the moment when Davey finally hit the ball. Having been born with a cataract that made me partially blind in my left eye, I could on some level sympathize with physical disability and being different, but my ailments couldn’t and didn’t keep me out of the social world of athletics. Davey, on the other hand, suffering from multiple physical and mental challenges to his body, deteriorated until he was no longer able to participate in organized sports around the time we entered into fifth grade. Despite this, Davey remained a large part of my life in the academic realm as I often tutored him in reading and writing activities.
By the time I reached junior high, I had given up on baseball because of my eyesight, but I had taken diligently to soccer and basketball; additionally, on occasion I would run the 800m and 1600m events in track though I never much cared for running competitively. Basketball, on the other hand, was something I really enjoyed playing. Although, I made the junior high basketball team as the twelfth man because of my ‘tenacity’ (as the coach had phrased it), my interest in the sport had developed primarily as a social activity to make friends over the summer. Given that most of my friends lived in the nearby countryside or on the other side of town where I wasn’t allowed to go, it was important that I maintain a way to continue to see them. Since basketball was what my friends played, I decided I needed to as well. Soccer, however, had become my singular passion, in part, because I was an excellent goalkeeper, and, perhaps more importantly, it provided me a way to connect with my dad with whom I had a strained relationship outside of sports.

Unfortunately, soccer never really remedied the hurt feelings I had towards my father during my youth. In fact, on occasion, soccer helped to exacerbate the situation. For example, when he wasn’t coaching, he would yell from the stands (as many parents do) at every mistake I would make, and when he was coaching it was even worse. One particularly poignant memory involves a time when two older boys on the team held me down and smashed poisonous field mushrooms in my face. Although my dad punished them, he insisted that I should be forced to run laps – a common athletic punishment – with them because I must have instigated the situation. Despite these struggles, I kept playing soccer in order to stay involved with the friends that had not abandoned the sport
for the more popular junior high football team and the rewards its popularity wrought – namely interest from girls. This position was made worse because despite that most of the ‘good’ soccer players had abandoned the sport I continued to be placed on what essentially amounted to the ‘B-team’ throughout junior high because of who I was and had been associated with rather than on the basis of an evaluation of my skill – a fixing of my identity to an inferior position, so to speak, not because of physical ability or athletic prowess but because of social factors like class, status and alter-masculinity.

Looking back at it now, it’s obvious that being on the soccer team also meant being less popular and less well-liked. Perhaps because soccer was – and remains – so unpopular in many parts of the US, it was often played by some of the town’s more unscrupulous kids. At practice one time in eighth grade, the new soccer coach (an eighteen-year-old college student) had not arrived yet, so for some reason a group of my teammates – my ‘friends’ – thought it would be humorous to encircle me while another teammate who was not my friend proceeded to whip me with the chain from a bike lock. Tears were streaming down my face in front of a group of male peers I desperately desired would respect me. After I finally escaped the circle my best friend helped me to the hillside away from the soccer fields to wait for any adult to show up. The event, which I have yet to forget, reminded me of a time earlier in my life when I was punished for playing too roughly by being held down and beaten by my aunt while my other aunt and cousins watched. In spite of this, that year in eighth grade, I was often individually recognized as one of the best players in the league. This meant that to give up soccer because of the personal problems I had developed vis-à-vis the sport would mean giving
up my only chances for popularity and a more legible masculine identity. Soccer, of all things, began to be an expression of almost all the pain and pleasure of my social relationships.

**Self-Narrative II: Serious soccer: sport and the masculine identity**

Although soccer had always been something I had taken seriously, it wasn’t until high school that it totally absorbed my life. Because school was never a challenge for me, I was able to spend most of my time playing soccer instead of studying. At first though, it seemed like I might be forced to take another path. When I went out for the team freshman year, I knew that I was going to be back-up goalkeeper because the guy who had played on the ‘A-team’ growing up had taken over the previous year when he was a freshman. This meant that I wouldn’t start, let alone play, in a single game until I was a senior and he graduated – or if, as I sometimes secretly hoped, he were to injure himself. Knowing this, I started talking to my parents about playing football or doing some sort of other activity, but my dad was insistent that I stay on with the team. Secretly, however, I began running with the cross country team while still going to soccer practice over the summer. Growing up, nothing was ever more fun to me than running and I had a natural talent for both distance running and sprinting. Unfortunately, the school had a policy of one sport per season, and when the fall semester came around I was told that I would have to choose. Obviously, given my past experiences with my dad and soccer, I knew what I would have to do.
So, there I was at the end of the bench every game in my orange goalie jersey – because I was just the ‘back-up’ goalkeeper the coaches didn’t even give me a real team jersey. Then out of nowhere, I remember the coach telling me to get ready to play because I was going in to replace an injured defender. I had no clue what to do; I wasn’t even paying attention to the game. And caught up in all the excitement, I forgot I didn’t have a jersey. So I ran up to the line to enter the game, and when the coach realized I didn’t have a jersey on, he told me to sit back down and called on another freshman. I was devastated. My body which once shook in nervous excitement now slumped in frustration. Momentary exuberance had descended into another failure at the hands of those in power over my soccer career.

However, this frustration wouldn’t last much longer. At the next practice, I was given a jersey from one of the pile of leftovers. I chose a senior’s jersey who had quit the team just before the season began and it was then that I would be number ‘25’ – a number which continues to define parts of my identity to this day because of the way athletics and masculinity enveloped much of my young life. During the next game, the injured player returned to the line-up so I resumed my spot on the bench, but at least I had my own jersey. And, I knew that this time I would be ready. However, fifteen minutes into the game, the coach called on me, and I went into the game. I played the rest of the first half and couldn’t imagine having played more terribly; yet, during the half-time speech, one of the senior captains told the rest of the team they needed to “get their head out of their asses and play like Donnie.” Apparently, I had been so impressive in my high school soccer debut that I had won over the support of the unlikeliest of allies: a senior. A few
games later in the season, another senior, a family friend growing up, broke his ankle and a spot in the starting line-up opened permanently for me. Not only did I excel on the field by tallying three goals and four assists in eight games, but from then on, I was included in ‘everything’ that went with being varsity. For example, on the way to road games, I got to sit at the back of the bus with the varsity and was introduced (via rather explicit narratives) into a world of violence, exclusion, misogyny, sexuality, and substance abuse; although many of the stories even then made me feel uneasy, at the time it just seemed like boys being boys.

After the season, I was among only three freshmen who received a varsity letter in soccer, and I became obsessed with maintaining that momentum. Realizing I would never make the high school basketball team based simply on my hard work and dedication as I had in junior high, I began playing indoor soccer again during the winter. While I had played indoor soccer several seasons during childhood, high school level indoor soccer was nothing like I had remembered. The speed and athleticism of the indoor game made me self-conscious about my weight and my ability to maintain endurance. By the end of the season, I had supposedly lost much of my ‘baby fat’ as my parents would refer to it and was starting to look like a ‘man’. During the spring of freshman year, my dad found a spring league team for me to play on with members of another school. Because this was not an official school sport, I was also able to start playing tennis which I decided to do primarily because most of my soccer friends were on the tennis team. Once again, I was torn juggling my time between a sport I wanted to play because my friends did and one which (was) dominated (by) my personal relationships. After a terrible spring season in
which I suffered more ‘losing’ because of playing soccer games short-handed (7-on-11) and having to quit the tennis team because my body was worn out, I was finally ready for a break. Little did I know but my dad had signed me up for soccer summer camp.

Through my first year of high school, I had spent so much of my time developing and promoting my soccer identity (and working to convince others it was how they should see me) that by the time summer started, I was tired and ready to be someone – something – else. Unfortunately, despite this, I was forced to spend two weeks literally eating, living, sleeping and becoming soccer. However, it was also at camp that I really discovered how intimately age, sport and gender identities were bound up in one another. When we weren’t practicing, training or playing, about 200+ 14-18 year olds were forced to hang out in (mostly) unsupervised co-ed dorms. Obviously, this sounds like the plot to a bad teen movie, but in reality, it’s where I learned how older teenage males treated and valued women and vice versa. While this behavior certainly isn’t exclusive to sports, I started to learn (outside of media perceptions) how power and popularity are embedded in a successful sports identity. To put it simply, the best players got the most attractive girls because they most embodied the masculine ideal. It was then I realized that I finally had a ‘good’ reason to keep playing and excelling at soccer. After soccer camp, I spent much of the summer being around my soccer teammates, playing/practicing soccer down at the high school field and talking about sex.

Most of my sophomore and junior years were about the same. I started getting better at soccer and winning awards; I started acting more ‘masculine’ and dating more girls. The better I got, the more people paid attention to me and the worse I treated my
lifelong friends – one of which was the friend who helped me escape the chain-whipping in junior high. It’s the most stereotypical tale of high school athletics but it happened to me. I wasn’t ashamed of becoming a jerk. In the spring of my junior year, my dad signed me up for a personal trainer and I started working out all the time; girls noticed. Despite the fact that I had a long-time serious girlfriend, I didn’t act like it. I continued to let my ego get wrapped up in my masculine sports identity, and the more time I spent playing soccer, the more I felt like an automaton. However, I should have realized that this couldn’t and wouldn’t last forever. Unfortunately, it never occurred to me how badly things could go after building up all that negative will against me.

The summer before my senior year, I decided not to attend soccer camp and instead spent quite literally every waking hour at the soccer field by myself working out and practicing. I was obsessed. And it was killing me. Although I’d suffered some minor injuries to my back, shoulder and ankles, I kept playing and even had been regularly prescribed pain killers. It didn’t matter how bad I felt; I wanted to be valued by others and I was determined to make it happen my senior year. Before the season started I made a list of achievements (e.g. MVP, All-State) and of twenty-five goals – literally, goals that I could check off as I scored them during the season. After scoring nine goals in the first three games, my coach let me know that I was going to be interviewed for the nearest ‘big-city’ newspaper. During the interview I remember talking about myself and ‘my list’ but also about how I felt like this was the year I could really take the team to the top and that I couldn’t have been playing so well without the help of great coaches and great teammates. I don’t think I really meant a lot of what I said and apparently neither
did the reporter. The next day I was on the front page of the sports section and the picture might as well have had a ‘bulls-eye’ on my chest.

At the time it only struck me as an odd editorial choice by the reporter to not include some of the comments I made about the team, but not everyone else thought it was so novel. Instead, backlash was immediate as soon as I got to soccer practice that night. While the coaches weren’t necessarily unhappy with me, my teammates made sure to let me know that I should go ahead and keep ‘carrying’ the team on my own. Between August and October 2006, I became painfully aware of the loneliness of a gross masculinity. I lost the support of my friends and my teammates and became the target of every team we played suffering nagging injuries and a few concussions along the way. Still, I kept scoring and breaking records, and despite the adversity – and probably because of it – I began to buy into the hype of my sports heroics. In October 2006, everything changed.

Early in the month I was stuck on twenty goals – had been for several games – and I was one goal away from tying the school record in career goals scored. The next game I played we were losing 6-0 and the season has been pretty much washed away with a 6-11-2 record. It was raining and I probably should have been sitting on the bench but I wasn’t because I needed to be that hero, if for nothing else to keep the fantasy of my masculinity intact. So there I was near the end of the game trying to score a meaningless goal and suddenly I tweaked my knee after taking a penalty. It didn’t really hurt too much at the time and I was ecstatic that I was getting to take a penalty shot and score my twenty-first goal – which I did. In what could only be explained as a fitting twist of fate,
later that week I found out my girlfriend had been sleeping around on me throughout our entire relationship because I was more interested in soccer than I was in her. Suddenly, for the first time since I was a kid, soccer took a backseat to the more personal emotions I was experience which required a more introspective evaluation of my identity and life.

The years spent training and obsessing the previous three years – and probably most of my sporting life – that I spent becoming and embodying this masculine sports ideal meant nothing. As focused as I had previously been on soccer, I became as equally uninterested in doing anything but ‘fixing’ my life. I promised myself and my girlfriend that after the season I would never worry about soccer again despite the fact that I knew my dad wanted me to play in college. In the last game of the season, I just couldn’t get interested in the game. Nothing really mattered anymore and I finished out the first half stretching on the ground after aggravating a back injury that I’d been nursing for a couple of years. There was a moment before the second half started where I hesitated about playing and asked my coach if I could sit out the rest of the game. But the game was still tied, and this adult man I wanted to be proud of me convinced me to go back out and keep playing so we could get a meaningless win. I wish I had given fair attention to these doubts and the intuition I’d gained from my alter-masculinity, but instead I gave in to the pressure of ‘being a man’ one last time. With the game still 0-0, I gave a quick give-and-go and darted down the field. On the pass back to me, I brought my left leg up to stop the ball from going out of bounds and with 8:08 left on the clock in the last regular season game of my senior year of high school, my soccer career ended taking with it my masculine identity.
Self-Narrative III: Death of an athlete, birth of (an)other masculinity

Having suffered a severe knee injury and a total blowout of my anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) as well severe structural damage to my kneecap, I was forced to re-evaluate my options for attending college. It became evident that my strong academic/intellectual background would have to take the place of my lost sports/masculine identity. The rest of my senior year, I felt emasculated, embarrassed and (mostly) alone. Without soccer, I wasn’t important anymore and I became prey to the politics of a small, rural high school. Following knee surgery three days after my high school graduation, I spent most of the summer months alone lying in bed wondering how I would ever be the same. No one came to visit and no one seemed to care and I realized it was because I had let my masculinity exclude me from real, meaningful relationships with others. Finally, having lost all my opportunities to play soccer in college, I was forced to attend a small university in West Virginia where I had received a full-academic scholarship.

I showed up to college without any sense of who I could or wanted to be – to add insult to injury, I was forced to walk around with a cane during my first semester in undergrad in a foreign environment. Instead of regaining some semblance of my previous masculine identity, I experienced in some small way the feelings of the disabled. Because I couldn’t stand the way people treated me, I stopped going to classes. I stopped showering, I stopped eating healthfully, and I stopped being anything except other – unclean, unhealthy, and un-masculine. The depression caused by no longer being myself left me on the edge of failing out of college my first two years, and then something
clicked. I started the process of becoming a geographer and I started thinking about how space and sport (and later, gender) were often co-constructed. Despite this brief moment of resurgence, I became acutely aware of how very unhappy I was with my body and my weight – and in fact, how unhealthy I felt about my masculinity.

Although I was able to shape a new identity in relation to my academic interests and various new social personas including president of my fraternity, the effects of not being able to exercise in the way I had before began to alter my body in ways that further damaged how I felt about myself. After the spring break of my sophomore year in college, I weighed almost 200 lbs. This may not seem like an overwhelming amount of weight, even at an average height of 5 feet 8 inches, I felt enormous in comparison to other people. This insecurity about my ‘fat body’ led me to re-craft my sports identity. At first I went back to basics of running, but it wasn’t long before I started lifting weights, reading male-oriented fitness magazines and taking supplements to help me bulk up. Because I couldn’t play sports anymore due to my knee reconstruction surgery, I realized that the best way for me to be an ‘athlete’ and masculine was to participate in individually-based sports fitness contests (i.e. duathlons, 5k runs).

Just like my last year in high school, my senior year of undergrad was spent being dedicated to disciplining my body. The problem this time was becoming very sickly obsessed with eating perfectly and exercising to the point of damaging my health. At first, I had altered my body and masculine identity to another extreme, one which excluded me again but I was unable to see it. For several months, I had warped my body into 140 lb waif and this led to me being called ‘tiny’ by my girlfriend and to comments
from my fraternity brothers that I needed to be a real man and eat more. So again, my body image and my ideal of masculinity shifted, and I recognized a need to find my Self in the mirror images of those associated with fitness culture. I kept logs of everything I ate making sure I fit perfectly into the requirements of the images of ‘healthy’ bodies I saw in magazines and in the fitness center of my university. I spent hours lifting weights in my room while running and cycling in the gym. While I became almost single minded about my fitness obsession, I was at least partially aware of the people I saw coming and going. Since I was lifting weights in my dorm room because I never really felt comfortable in the weight room, I did pay attention to the fact that there were almost never any women in there because of the atmosphere created by the men who lifted weights in the tiny dark room. I remember, at the time, thinking it was odd that men were able to come into the cardio room but women would almost never attempt to lift weights. It was then I started thinking about the type of people who worked out and, as a geographer, I started thinking more specifically about where people worked out and why. Although it was mostly just a passing thought, the idea became more concrete when I started attending Kent State.

**Developing Research around Personal Experience**

While the initial thrust of this research was foreground in my experiences of youth sports participation and my high school sports identity, the final objectives of the project came out of my time exercising and working out at my undergraduate university and at Kent State. Although another knee injury during undergrad kept me from
continuing to participate in competitive racing, it helped me realize the intensity of people (myself included) who obsess over their sports/body/gender image. Specifically, the questions that emerged in developing this thesis center around the themes and spaces of: 1) belonging and exclusion/inclusion; 2) sports, recreation and fitness; 3) play and of performance; and 4) femininities, masculinities and difference. These questions begin from the more generic to the specific and are answered over the next three chapters.

**Research question 1:** What types of people exercise at the Kent State Recreation and Wellness Center (KSUSRWC)?

**Research question 2:** How are these people included and excluded in particular activity spaces (e.g. weightlifting, running, cardio machines, sports) based on their age, gender and level of ability?

**Research question 3:** How do these types of belonging (inclusions and exclusions) and their corresponding activities relate to understandings of sports, recreation and fitness?

**Research question 4:** What sports, recreation and fitness activities fit into distinctions of more serious ‘performance’ and less serious ‘play’?

**Research question 5:** How do differences in gender (i.e. alternative masculinities and femininities) and age allow for transgression of spaces of ‘performance’ and ‘play’?

**Research question 6:** In what ways are spaces and gendered/aged bodies re-created by these differences and transgressions?
In the chapters that follow, I first analyze the theoretical framework in an historical, progressive traditional literature review and answer the more fundamental questions related to defining the terms sports, recreation, play and performance. In this I also explain a perspective of geography that emphasizes the need to move beyond some of the more simpler appellations of these terms in relation to the key words ‘space’ and ‘place’. Finally, I conclude this literature review with a philosophical-social theoretical positioning that will help inform and be co-written into my methodology and also my observation and interview analyses. It is in these analyses that I hope to answer the above questions in a meaningful way that helps construct a various set of images that position the recreation center in starkly different ways.
Chapter 3
Geographic Thought, Sports Place and Embodied Differences

Introduction

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, much of my life has influenced my topical interests in becoming a geographer, and just like my life, much of my becoming a geographer has influenced my theoretical interests in the discipline. These interests can be traced along a similar trajectory to research within the discipline as a whole and to human geography following after the regional tradition in the 1930s and the changing definitions of ‘space’. I draw upon David Harvey’s *Space as a key word* (2006) to explore what he understands as a tripartite definition of space which is comprised of “absolute”, “relative” and “relational” spaces. While I do not fully agree with such a strict understanding of space, noting these conceptualizations demonstrates how important these parts of the history of geographic theory are to my research. My initial understandings of geography stemmed from what is often regarded as an empiricist, positivist, or behavioralist perspective; I came to believe space was merely a container for human activity, an absolute and material construction that allowed for researchers to differentiate between one area and another while studying the ‘spatial interaction’ of humans across scales and in unique places. Looking at space this way is addressed by both what Harvey refers to as ‘absolute’ space which “is fixed and we record or plan events within its frame” (2006: 121) and ‘relative’ space in which “there are multiple
geometries from which to choose and [...] the spatial frame depends crucially upon what it is that is being relativised and by whom” (122).

During this initial engagement with space, the introduction to the ideas of ‘scale’ and ‘place’ led me to think more critically about the ‘nature of geography’ (Hartshorne 1939), and I began to reconsider how past geographies of regions and place had influenced new ideas in the works of ‘radical’ geographers written during the late-1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Structuralist and Marxist works (Harvey 1973; Peet 1975, 1981) provided me with new insight regarding how the creation of space was both influenced by and has an influence on human behavior and is defined, quite often, specifically around class relationships. Additionally, humanist writings (Ley 1981; Relph 1985) about individuals’ perceptions of certain spaces and the creation of ‘a sense of place’ helped me see that geography, as I was beginning to understand it, was more than just generalizations about predicted and actual human spatial behavior; these ‘relational’ notions of space were about *man* as agent shaping and being shaped by the spaces and places *he* inhabited.

I emphasize ‘man’ and ‘he’ to note that until this point in my becoming a geographer, I had little exposure to differences in race, ethnicity, sex, gender, religion, or a myriad of ‘other’ subject positions. It wasn’t until I began engaging with feminist, postmodern and poststructural geographies that I realized the diversity of perspectives both in academic conceptualizations of space and in the everyday experience of spatial activities. Looking again to Harvey (2006), this assortment of spatial ‘knowledges’ can be described by “the relational view of space [which] holds there is no such thing as
space or time outside of the processes that define it. [. . .] Processes do not occur in space but define their own spatial frame. The concept of space is embedded in or internal to process” (123). While perhaps Harvey would not use his framework as a metaphor for the changes in the American academic geographical imagination over the past 50 years, I feel that it suitably addresses the metamorphosis of the definition of space (at least in a general sense), of the discipline, of my own perspective on/in ‘geography’, and the transformation in sports geographies. More specifically, I believe all space to be relational as it is constantly produced and reproduced both by the definitions and meanings (Murdoch 2006) which are applied through power relations at an institutional level (e.g. codifying a specific area as ‘the weight room’) and within our personal relationships to/with others (e.g. this is where I belong and that is where you belong).

The point of this history (of geographic thought) lesson is not merely to demonstrate my knowledge of the discipline of geography but rather to contextualize how I understand the geographical concept of space and its connection to specific theoretical movements within the discipline. Furthermore, pointing to these shifts in the discipline as theorized through Harvey (2006), I have offered a framework for better understanding the way sports geography has been studied in the past. However, it is important to note that I am not drawing a chronological line starting during the so-called ‘quantitative revolution’ and emerging at some ultimate end around the postmodern turn (and beyond); instead, I am pointing out that for every way of understanding ‘space’ there are a diverse number of approaches based on particular epistemological, ontological and methodological choices. As is shown in the next section, one way of explaining geography’s ‘relational’ nature is
through an examination of how human-centered approaches have developed alongside theories of ‘place’.

**Re-thinking Geography, Humans and the Study of Place**

Another way of thinking through the history of geography is by considering its focus on human spatial behavior, the ‘making’ of place and the study of landscape. The concepts of ‘place’ and ‘landscape’ developed in many ways from a shared background set against the backdrop of the first human-centered movement in modern geographical theory: that of the regional approach. I position the regional approach as a human-centered movement because it was developed as a scientific way of explaining human-environment relationships in a way that also addressed the subjective, descriptive and empirical realities of different areas (i.e. regions) rather than through the de-humanizing generalizations of the environmental determinist movement. However, despite their contrasts, both theoretical movements essentialized notions of place as static and determinable although this was manifested in different ways. For regional geographers, extensive studies of an area would lead to an explanation of an individual region by way of articulating certain factors about it such as its resources, population, crop growth or watershed area (Herbertson 1916; Fleure 1919; see also Cloke, Philo, and Sadler 1991). On the other hand, in a very shallow way of looking at the issue, environmental determinists believed that these factors of a given area could be used to explain why the population existed in a particular way. What was of concern to both types of studies, though, was the way in which a specific area or region could be distinguished from
another; thus the history of ‘place’ (or, place-specific study) extends back to the
beginnings of modern geography (Cresswell 2004).

Although place and landscape studies were largely abandoned throughout the
period of the quantitative revolution they were repurposed by the second human-centric
movement in geography, namely that of the phenomenological and existential humanism
of the 1970s and 1980s. During this period place and landscape gained new meanings as
the containers of sensations, values and relationships (Castree 2003, 2009). Still though,
this perspective essentialized an authentic, natural and privileged perception of the idea
of place. Conceptualizations of landscape and place became associated with the view of
the ‘insider’ focused through a masculine research lens rather than an encompassing
human perspective. This notion was rightfully challenged on two fronts by both Marxian
and feminist geographers. Marxist-structural geographers, rather than arguing about the
individuality of place, sought instead to uncover the connections and structures that
created the spaces of production, consumption and reproduction (as did some feminist
geographers influenced by the Marxist tradition) while later feminist geographies of the
80s sought to introduce a more inclusive notion of place.

Here, what I term the third wave of the human-centered thrust in geography was
split primarily between feminist geographies which addressed conflicts of the different
perspectives inherent in identifying places and landscapes (Massey 1979, 1994;
McDowell 1983) as well as the subjectivity of the author in studies of those concepts
(England 1994; Rose 1993) and secondly, the so called structruational approaches which
developed from the reconciliation of structural and agentic perspectives (Giddens 1984;
Thrift 1983). Understanding geography through this historical perspective, it becomes possible to loosely categorize these theoretical approaches as variations of a ‘critical humanistic’ endeavor to explore and explain human-environment relationships. Of the most recent, and quite popular, forms of this philosophical debate are the post- and anti-humanist (yet still critically humanistic) arguments emerging from within the post-structural movement. These approaches influenced by the works of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze offer alternatives to focusing specifically on the human as subject and instead on the social relationships that position ‘humans’ in the larger contexts of society. That said, looking back on the history of human study in the discipline, I perceive that these three (or four) specific movements or responses to how humans and place function as geographical subjects began first with the regional tradition, were secondly expanded upon by the humanist approaches (note the difference between humanist and humanistic), critiqued thirdly by a wave of critical humanisms, and are continually now being expressed through post- and anti-humanist debates. It is within this ‘humanistic’ history of geographical thought that the study of place and landscape must be examined in the context of sports geographies.

**Sports Through Region/Landscape/Place**


The purpose of looking at geography through a humanist lens is based on three elements essential to the make-up of the sub-discipline of Sports Geography in its present context: first, historically – going back to the 1950s – it developed with an interest in the
concept of regions. Burley (1962) notes that the fundamental areas of sports studies in geography are the: economic aspects, social aspects, cultural origins, physical conditions, and urban land use(s). Implicit in all of these is the identification of human-environment relationships within the context of regions based on the “areal variations [which] provide an important clue to the manner in which man has adapted himself to his environment” (55). Later work by Rooney (1970, 1981, 1982 and 1986) developed throughout the 70s and 80s combined a positivist cartographic approach to the study of sports regions and athlete production. For Rooney (1974), geography’s work with place centered on an understanding of “spatial arrangement and organization” using “locational analysis” (4-5). Though this may seem stretched from notions of place in a human context, he goes on to note that geography ultimately “seeks to understand why various things are where they are” (5) which is very closely related to Cresswell’s (1996) understanding of place as the study of how things come to be in place or out of place through social relationships. From there, the foundations set by Burley, though largely ignored by Rooney as much as anyone else, and the work generated by Rooney himself sustained the sub-field until the return of humanist-influenced sports geographies.

As just mentioned, the second reason for ‘placing’ sports geographic research in the history of critical humanism is that its development has been primarily articulated by the humanist works of John Bale and Karl Raitz. Raitz, like many geographers of the humanist movement, conflates our understanding of sense of place by explaining it through the idea of the ‘perception of landscape’. For example, Raitz (1987) claims “sport places can be differentiated one from another in terms of their sense of place and it
is this distinctiveness of place that is so attractive” (5) and yet “[i]t is the sports landscape that contains the sense of place that we associate with distinctive experiences” (6). However, moving beyond his thoughts on landscape, he does offer some clarity elsewhere, explaining through an example of foxhunting that “[p]lace is the physical and cultural context of the” sports experience (Raitz 1998: 166). Somewhat distinct from Raitz, Bale, the most prolific writer in the sub-field, seems to waffle a bit between this classic humanist perspective and a more critically nuanced humanistic understanding of place as an intermediary between the forces of structure and agency, though he never goes quite so far as to label his work in one way or another. In this section, though, I will focus primarily on his contributions to humanist inquiries into sport before returning later to how his work can influence contemporary sports geographies.

Early work by Bale (1988) is almost entirely focused on the role of place in creating a more noticed (and noticeable) development of sports geography. He, like Raitz, conceptualizes place as sport in the cultural landscape and looks at spatiality through the “application of ideas relating to territoriality and community [. . .] ‘cроссcultural voyeurism’ [and] a number of topophilic aspects of sports relate[d] to the ideas of place-attachment, place-pride and boosterism” (Bale 1988: 510-511). Furthermore, he argues that “the authentic sport place or sport landscape generates a strong sense of place genus loci” (Bale 1992: 7). In this work, he generates a taxonomy of sport related to place and landscape which can be clarified through Castree’s (2003, 2009) interpretation of Agnew’s (1987) own taxonomy of place. Compared to one another, we can see that Bale’s (1992) understanding of: 1) sport as the medium for place
can be interpreted as the locational dynamic of place in Castree’s argument, while; 2) Bale’s position that sport is a source of topophilia can be viewed through the ‘sense of place’ dynamic, and 3) the idea that “sport is a focus for place” (Bale 1992: 7) can be read as “place as locale” (Castree 2009: 155). Yet, in Bale’s work (1988, 1992), the same place/landscape conflation results in a loss of meaning which does not allow for the full development of either concept in a meaningful way, but it does illustrate the theoretical foundations of sports geography, which few others in the past twenty years have built on.

Because of this, the third reason for locating sports geography in the course of humanistic development is that it needs to be re-conceptualized to modern understandings of place which loose themselves from the humanist tradition of place and landscape study. While Bale (1996; Bale and Philo 1998) has continued to address more ‘place’-oriented research in his sports geographies during the 90s, he remained woefully tied to the use of landscape and topophilia instead of addressing the more pressing – or, at least popular – concerns of the politics of place and identity. While some recent works (e.g. Shobe 2008a, 2008b) are found in geographical journals that specifically attempt to engage with a serious discussion of historical sports geographies, most research on sport and place is found in journals on the sociology of sport, leisure and tourism (e.g. Higham and Hinch 2006). Other work (e.g. McGuirk and Rowe 2001; Saville 2008; Waitt 2003, 2008) appears in broader geographical literature but does little to actually deal with sports in the geographical context of place and is more interested in how identities and places are formed and imagined through sport places. Beyond this work, little is done in uncovering a theory of place within sports geography and even worse Bale’s wide variety
of writings are often only tangentially referenced. It is with this goal in mind that I would like to briefly discuss how to bring ‘place’ back into the discussion of sports geography. Primarily, I am concerned with two things: first, to address the gap in sports geographic research in the ‘Bale-ian’ tradition following the 1990s, and second, to express how I see place fitting into the discussion of sports geography post-Bale within the critical humanistic, post-humanistic and anti-humanistic theories of a critical contemporary Geography.

Contemporary updates on classic geographies of sport: 1998-2008

It is important to note that outside of work published prior to the 1990s by geographers and John Bale’s own contributions, discussing the topic of ‘sports geography’ is next to impossible without acknowledging the works developed since the 1980s of sociologists and other social scientists working in the diverse field of Sports Studies. Yet, this can quickly become problematic because the notions of place developed in these works are in direct conflict with theoretical developments in Geography because of misinterpretation and because of incompatible theories (e.g. humanism in geography vs. figurational theory in the sociology of sport). For example, if we limit the discussion to some of the articles I’ve just mentioned which are influenced by but still separate from Bale, then discussions about place become essentially ‘common-place’ – that is, the term is used as generically as possible in contextualizing where sport literally takes place. In Higham & Hinch (2006), place is conflated with (absolute) space with geography serving for the physical environment in general. Furthermore, space is more explicitly conceived
of as location with place simply serving for the meaning ascribed to that location. This perspective is presented by Cresswell (2004), but he makes an extremely important modification. For him, “[p]lace, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power” (12; emphasis added).

Without recognizing this important element, Higham and Hinch (2006) begin what is essentially a more refined positivist-humanist approach to sports development citing both environmental factors such as climate and economic factors such as market location as major reasons why sports spaces exist the way they do. This is combined later with a fairly appropriate understanding of place as the subjective negotiation of spatial arrangements, but ultimately, the authors decide that “[d]ifferences in place identity serve as the basis for marketing and may in turn be influenced by the efforts of place marketers” (Higham and Hinch 2006: 40). In doing this, they concede that power is invested in place by ‘marketers’ and reduce sports place as location and explain that location is about marketing. Although there is a well-developed, sophisticated discussion of space and place, the key referents in Geography are those on the fringe of the discipline working in recreation and tourism studies and sports geography prior to 1990. Instead of getting an accurate picture of what Geography has been doing in terms of space and place theory over the past 20 years, the authors are using an inaccurate frame of Geographical debate which renders their ability to contribute to contemporary disciplinary research far less significant.

Similarly, the work of McGuirk and Rowe (2001) explores how place-based identities are formed through Benedict Anderson’s (2006) understanding of imagined
communities as well as the works of a range of geographers focusing on studies of cultural consumption. For them, “[p]laces have come to be conceptualized as constructed through a dynamic articulation of their material and representational dimensions, and place identity is understood to be mutable, contingent and fluid” (McGuirk and Rowe 2001: 52). While this article excellently develops an understanding of place from a broader cultural studies perspective, it begins to lose its geographical relevance as space/place/geography essentially serve as the image one has of a particular location. Much like other ‘contemporary’ works in and around the sub-field, it does little to push the boundaries of how we do sports geographies. Unfortunately, this is more the rule than the exception when it comes to the development of sports geography both inside and outside the discipline. In the first example, geography as a whole is rather inaccurately referenced and sports geography separately is even more obscured. In the second, the glaring inadequacy of sports geography to remain relevant with theoretical shifts is demonstrated by its inability to contribute to broader discussions of place and place-identity.

The failure of sports geography is made especially clear by Shobe (2008a; 2008b) whose work on place identities and Spanish football published in two separate geographical journals has more to do with sociology than it does with geography. While both are excellent pieces that could in many ways contribute to an updated sports geography, there is so little that ties the work to any geographical literature that these instead seem to be more accurately placed in the context of the sociology of sport. However, Shobe (2008b) raises several important points about representation, power
relations and difference in the context of sport that can carry us into the discussion of what sports geography should and can be following the humanistic works through the mid-90s. Furthermore, while both the works of Saville (2008) and Waitt (2008) fail to deal at all with any work by ‘sports geographers’, they do exemplify alternatives and examples of what sports geography has to offer when focused on contemporary issues in the discipline. The most important of these points are directly relevant to discussions of the critical inquiries of feminism and post-structuralism about place: how are places represented, how are places shaped by power relations, how are places different and how do places foster spaces of difference?

Critical sports geography, Bale and beyond: 2003-

It would be pointless, if not unfair, to redress John Bale’s work if for nothing else because he spent so much effort contributing so many different works on sports geography and much of this was indicative of the era of geography he wrote in during the 70s, 80s and 90s, but it should be made clear that he explicitly stated he was not intending to develop a theory of sports geography (Bale 2003a). However, reading his works, it is obvious that there is a string of development that becomes more critical from the 90s onward, but fails to take significant shape following the discipline defining work *Sports Geography* (2003). In looking at Bale’s (1988; 1992; 1996) discussions of place through the lens of this work, it is still impossible to separate his work from humanistic inquiry about the authentic nature of place. This becomes further evident when positioned against his concern for the post-modern simulation of natural sports spaces (2003).
Unfortunately, for sports geography to remain relevant it must move beyond the concern for a sense of place and beyond the fear of the shallowness of post-modern society. Instead, it needs to re-think place as event and performance (Massey 2005).

This could be particularly relevant to a discussion of sports geography given that we are so used to hearing about ‘sporting events’ and ‘athletic performances’. It should not be taken as coincidence that these words appear so casually in sports discussions because so much of sports are about the places that are created through and by the performance of embodied subjects. Furthermore, sport is expressly about the body which is being increasingly conceptualized in broader geographical literature as a fluid PLACE upon which social and political interactions occur: all of which is important to a feminist and post-structuralist agenda.

None of this is to say we should abandon research about perceptions of place and sense of place; rather, it is to note that for sports geography to hold any importance in the discipline of geography, it must come on board with new conceptualizations of place not simply for relevance but also to help expand the ways we think about place theory. For example, as just mentioned, sport offers a chance to understand place through the coming together of social, political and economic factors in a way that is unique to a select group of cultural activities in the performance arts, broadly speaking. While Raitz (1995) acknowledges that “[a] sporting event takes place in a distinctive setting that is a kind of theater” and that “to remove activity from those places or to change or modify them is to alter performance” (vii), he fails to develop this beyond the typical humanist construct of the ‘landscape ensemble’. Consider for instance the similar terminologies such as event,
performance, player, audience/spectator, stage, and scene among others. Whereas the performing arts have received popular consideration lately because of their emergence in the humanities, sports studies in the social sciences like that mentioned above have largely failed to capitalize on what are obviously similar frameworks for common understanding.

Finding space between ‘sports’ and ‘recreation’; ‘play’ and ‘performance’

While it is perhaps not the type of sports geography that one imagines because it hardly deals with what is regarded as ‘serious, achievement oriented sports’ as exemplified in the history of sports geography, this research project, instead, represents an often ignored side of geographical sports research: recreational sporting and fitness activities. Even Bale (2003a) openly admits in his seminal text that he is “more concerned with top-class, achievement oriented sport than with sport as recreation” (2). Despite this, there is ample room in Bale’s framework and the history of sports geography to develop critical research on sports-recreation, sports-fitness and other forms of sports-performance from a geographical perspective.

Rooney (1974: 4-12) for his part sets out in *A Geography of American Sport* a framework dedicated to professionalized sports activities focused primarily on six aspects for a geographer of sport to study which are 1) the spatial variation in games, 2) the spatial organization of sport, 3) origin and diffusion of games and players, 4) the sport region, 5) the effect of sport on landscape, and 6) sports and national character. Additionally, in this he briefly gives note about the importance of the variation in
different types of games that serve as sporting activities. Burley (1962) also recognizes the split between traditional ‘recreational geography’ as introduced by McMurry and Davis (1954) and a geography of sports recreation by suggesting “that sport, and more particularly home-based leisure sport, is a subject worthy of the geographer’s attention” (Burley 1962: 56). Yet, to this day, no geographer has attempted to develop an alternative geography of/to sport.

This is perhaps because those who have engaged with thinking about sports and geography have followed a similar line of thought to Wagner (1981) who begins his discussion of sports geography by expanding on the differences between sports and recreation. This, above all the other key texts in the history of sports geography mentioned thus far, is integral to my discussion of a sports geography of recreation because Wagner (1981) claims that “[o]ne of the features [. . .] that distinguishes “sports” from mere “recreation” is the fact that sports activity almost always calls for a specific kind of “place”” (85; emphasis mine). While his distinction is based on the argument that recreation is too generic a term, he does little to pull sports recreation from the remains of the destruction of his opening sentence. He even goes further to suggest that

“[w]hat is commonly called “sport”, however, stands out clearly from all other recreational activity, and even from work, by virtue of an essentially geographic attribute, its time-space specificity. It likewise is distinguished by the eminently spatial formulation of its drama, and the high imputed meaning focused on the historicity, or record-generating character, of its performances. Further, it is marked by emphasis on discipline accepted freely and enthusiastically without a rationale of practicality” (Wagner 1981: 89).

Though there is some good sense in distinguishing between a general idea of ‘sport’ and an idea of ‘recreation’, Wagner begins to tread on dangerous ground by setting the two
terms in opposition to one another with sport assuming dominant priority. In effect, what begins to emerge from Wagner’s theorization is a direct correlation in which sport gains identity with geography and recreation is left for some ‘other’ to study. He expresses the thought that “the practice of all sport – not “recreation” – seems to cohere as a single fundamental cultural reality, and all its various geographic aspects evidently merge into a structure of strong relationships” (Wagner 1981: 107).

From these distinctions primarily by Bale and Wagner it becomes clear that by and large, sport is synonymous with place, and ‘performance’ – as an understanding of achievement within the context of sports – helps to create these sports places. If we think about the implications of this then we begin to see a hierarchy form within the literature that comprises the history of sports geography wherein a number of familiar dualisms emerge: masculine/feminine, performance/play, sports/recreation, young/old, healthy/unhealthy, ability/disability and culture/nature. This dualistic thinking is especially evident in consideration of Bale’s (2003a) distinctions adapted from Eichberg (1998: 9, see Figure 3.1) that sports essentially function as a ‘trialectic’ divided between: serious sports and achievement space, recreational sport and recreational/hygienic space, and new waves of body culture and experiential space. Witherick and Warn (2003: 6) help clarify further the activities, goals and spaces for each of these forms of sport:
1) “achievement sport – a deadly serious and highly competitive business in which people and teams seek to prove their superiority”,

2) “welfare sport – undertaken in order to keep fit and healthy”, and

3) “play sport – done for fun and often spontaneously”.

![Diagram](image)


While it is recognized that these different types of spaces and experiences influence one another and that “different kinds of body cultures […] require and produce different kinds of bodies and different kinds of places and spaces” (Bale 2003a: 8), the descriptions of the typical activities and aims of these particular spatial configurations
creates tension between whose bodies will (and can) use and produce these different spaces. For example, most literature demonstrates a remarkable amount of sexism by identifying a typically male-dominated sport such as football as an example of an achievement sport/space while children on the other hand are identified as those who engage in the experience and spaces of play. As evidenced in the previous chapter, sometimes there is nothing ‘playful’ about children’s sports recreation.

As the trialectic becomes more defined, the dualisms seem to line up in frightening fashion in which achievement space becomes masculinized, representative of culture, a place of ability, competition and performance while experiential space becomes the center of freedom, nature, femininity and play. And if we are to engage with this crude and simplistic ‘trialectic’ then somewhere between these two opposites emerges a type of space that bridges them. It is a space and an activity in which bodies engage in recreation and becoming; in Bale’s (2003a) estimation, the gymnasium or the fitness center is where “[t]he body is re-created so that it works better” (8). For Bale, it is seemingly a one way process in which the bodies of individuals move from play to performance, from a lack of to a gain in fitness. On the other hand, spaces of re-creation seem to me to be where play and performance help us better understand differences in age and gender (among other subject positions). In the next section, I will explain how children’s geographies and feminist geographies have inspired how I interpret play and performance as similar embodied place-making activities, how we can think about why we engage in these activities and how they help us to belong to certain types of places.
Expanding Contemporary Sports Geography beyond Sports

Understanding belonging in the context of age and gender

Much of the literature emanating from human geography and sociological research associated with ‘children’s (and young people’s) geographies’, seeks to destabilize the primarily ‘adultist’ perspective from which most knowledge is produced and to dispel ideas about the natural playfulness of youth. Likewise, feminist geographies have engaged with issues of performance, ‘performativity’ and ‘subjectivities’ and the linkages between differences in ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. In the case of both groups, the goal has been to understand how their specific subject positions have been constructed and how that impacts their state of social and spatial belonging. Dixon and Jones (2006: 49, emphasis added) express that “[f]eminist geographers working with theories of social constructions of gender, for example, are interested in the ways in which discursive categories, particularly male/female and masculine/feminine, are brought into play at specific times and in specific places in order to establish spaces of exclusion and inclusion”.

More specifically, the ‘spaces of exclusion and inclusion’ located within the recreation (fitness) center – at least at the Kent State University Student Recreation and Wellness Center – are primarily populated by ‘college-age’ individuals where age and gender hold an important role in where people can(not) go and what types of activities they perform. As Kay (2003) notes, sport “is a site where the unequal social relations that underpin women’s experience of social exclusion are very persuasively reproduced” (101). Though she is specifically speaking to the experience of women, the issue of
gender extends beyond that distinction and can be focused on all the unequal social relationships that emerge between groups of varying power differentials especially those in the binary spectrums of the masculine/feminine and the adult/child. Vanderbeck and Dunkley (2004) suggest that young people “often reproduce broader societal discourses and practices which serve to ‘other’ particular groups of young people, but they are also active cultural producers in their own right, capable of challenging exclusionary discourses and practices and creating their own complex systems of inclusion and belonging” (1).

Sibley (1995: x) similarly asks us from a more geographical perspective to think about “who are places for, whom do they exclude, and how are these prohibitions maintained in practice?” He continues that it is necessary “to identify forms of socio-spatial exclusion as they are experienced and articulated by the subject groups. These groups […] may be seen as dominant or subordinate, depending on the way in which they are categorized” (x). Part of my argument then is that understanding why age and gender subject groups experience different types of domination or subordination can better link sports geography to contemporary debates about belonging in the discipline.

Children’s geographies as a context for the study of youth and age

While some may question my placement of this research in the scheme of children’s and young people’s geographies, I argue that because it seeks to recognize differences in age throughout the lifecourse, it has created a need to acknowledge the impact age has on our social lives especially our ability to belong. The history of
children’s studies has been observed almost exclusively from a developmental perspective, and the recent history of human geography has been one that has embraced changes in the social sciences and the humanities which have sought to transform the way we think about ‘natural’ development. As a pioneer in the field, Stuart Aitken (1994) attempts in his disciplinary-defining text, *Putting Children in Their Place*, to unite both of these trends by offering a short history of geographic thought on children’s studies, assessing the dimensions of other research on the topic, and expanding the discussion to areas and intersections of current interest.

Aitken primarily draws upon the works of Bill Bunge and James Blaut, acknowledging their work as the predecessors to a geography of children. Bunge’s (1973) work attempted to argue for a more ‘radical’ approach to geography in general while commenting on the welfare of urban children. Blaut and Stea (1971) on the other hand contributed new methodological approaches to these areas of study by thinking about children’s cognitive mapping abilities. In what can be considered the first explicitly geographical text on children, Roger Hart’s *Children’s Experience of Place* (1979: 5) concerns itself with a detailed account of the “spatial activity”, “place knowledge”, “place values and feelings” and “place-use” of children. Hart begins by acknowledging important works on children’s developmental studies but asserts his own desire for approaching the topic from a perspective that “[integrates] children’s activities with consciousness” (9). By locating himself thus, he begins to move beyond the framework of behavioral geography used by Blaut and into the aforementioned humanist movement focusing directly on the ‘sense of place’ of the human subject, in this case, children. Such
a unique study had never been attempted, and Aitken credits Hart for pioneering several methodological and theoretical components of children’s geographies including some initial developments in identifying the way sex differences are constructed through engagements with different types of play.

Initially, Aitken contributed to the sub-field by exploring the dimensions of Blaut and Stea’s behavioral work as well as Roger Hart’s perceptual work. However, while much of his early work seeks to put children’s geographies in its place by locating it within a specific theoretical and conceptual history, Aitken’s most valuable contribution is by opening up discussion of the self-other binary – something sports geography in the past has not necessarily engaged with. Aitken (1994: 30) reflects “[o]f all people that can be constituted as other in that they are different from ourselves, children are perhaps the most perplexing because they are intimately part of our lives and they are also, in large part, constituted by what we are and what we do”. Aitken and Wingate (1993) also point out that self and other are defined uniquely in “different contexts” and that it is important to acknowledge the subjectivity of both the observer and the observed. Though some attention is paid to a child’s development of the self and the understanding of the other, Aitken’s focus on development critiques the work of prominent psychologist Jean Piaget and a smattering of geographers, philosophers and sociologists. His understanding is that “as a constructivist, Piaget believed that what we take as real is a construction of thought; as a structuralist he believed that there exist specific stages of cognitive development (Piaget 1952, 1971)” (Aitken 1994: 38).
These distinctions between the constructed and the real, for Aitken, are necessary because they presuppose his argument that a child’s development is culturally constructed by political, economic, and social institutions. He explores this social construction by locating children within an indoors-outdoors dichotomy in which “indoors is a private or institution domain, a locus of adult dominance and the limiting effects of ‘family’ and ‘school’” while “[t]he outdoors affords a different kind of environment, public and perusable, providing an opportunity for engagement with natural systems and cultural politics” (1994: 58). The indoors-outdoors dichotomy helps explain the social construction of children as ‘angels’ and ‘devils’, as either good or bad, by adults. This, he believes, plays into and comes out of adults’ fear of children behaving in ‘un-childlike’ ways. In Aitken and Marchant (2003), the authors perform a case-study of youth violence and the ways in which the violence is treated based on the individual’s sex and gender, race and ethnicity, and class. In his earlier work, Aitken (1994) notes this construction by suggesting that adults attempt to ‘protect’ children from the outdoors in an attempt to keep them from becoming wild (and to prevent them from becoming violent). Here we see a similar parallel to the distinctions between ‘achievement space’ (culture/performance) and ‘play space’ (nature/play) as described in the context of sports geographies. In this case, the institutions of family and school essentially form the way that children become adults.

Within the relationships between adult and child, several dynamics have been developed that attempt to rethink the ‘adult-child boundary’, the ‘adult-child binary’ (also the ‘adult-adolescent-child trinary’), and the differences between generations. Holt and
Holloway’s (2006) editorial reflects on the development of a greater understanding of constructed meanings about child, children, youth and young people in the growing field of children’s geographies. All of the previous distinctions have been given some attention at one time or another, but it is difficult to locate one single thread where each of the issues is fully explored. Little work has specifically been done on the issue of adult-child binary because almost all authors understand the relationship in completely different ways and use this conceptualization to draw general thoughts on the topic at the start of their research; however, the most coherent stream of thought references the issues of self-other, and so more research explores the issues of boundary location rather than who belongs in the groups on either side of the boundary.

In the case of the ‘adult-child boundary’, Gill Valentine (2003) acknowledges the difficulty in determining exactly when a child becomes an adult (and when an adult can no longer be considered a child) because of the obscurity of development following sexual maturation in the early ‘teenage’ years. She notes that “[w]hile the age range 7-14 has received considerable attention from geographers, the discipline has been slower to consider young people on the cusp of childhood and adulthood: those aged 16-25” (2003: 39). Valentine uses this perceived neglect as a vehicle to argue for a more comprehensive study of young people caught along the adult-child border. Their exclusion in research suggests a worse fate than the ‘children’ whom are being actively shaped and constructed by academic literature. Other work trying to distinguish between children and ‘youth’ has been Weller’s (2006) study on “young teenagers” and the word “teenager” as a culturally specific construction as well as Valentine’s (2000) discussion of how “young people are
sometimes precariously caught between competing definitions of acceptable performances of identity from peers at school and parents at home” (2000: 265) in trying to locate themselves within this ambiguous boundary.

Throughout this part of the literature review, I have pointed out several areas where I feel that my research can be suitably attached; specifically, I feel that Valentine’s studies of older teenagers is particularly useful in creating space for this project. Most literature, geographical or otherwise, takes our development as children for granted and assumes our behavior as adults is from only our experiences as adults. Again, referencing my own autoethnography, it would be impossible for me to deny how intimately bound up gender, age and recreation are now for me as an adult because of all the experiences I’ve had throughout my life unmitigated by an idea of ‘growing up’ or out of those emotions experienced earlier in life. Furthermore, connecting studies on children and childhood to larger bodies of research (specifically feminist studies), in my opinion, is an important first step when attempting to explore an age group which blurs the boundaries of the adult/child binary. For instance, as the previous chapter showed, I’m engaged in this research because of my sports experiences during youth and because of how they continue to affect the way I think about space, sports and my (aged, gendered) body.

Feminism, gender differences and geography

Though studies of age in geography are easier to define now thanks to the generation of a codified sub-field, the definition of feminism is as widespread and numerous as are the possible approaches a researcher can adopt; that is to say, feminism
can lend itself to the exploration of the dimensions of sex, gender and sexuality of any topic from any perspective. The Women and Geography Study Group (1984: 20) think through the purpose of feminist geography, which they see as a “geography which explicitly takes into account the socially created gender structure of society”. They elaborate that much of feminism has been focused on the importance of bringing equality to females, but also note that, until there is recognition of the societal underpinnings of the fact that these are constructed differences then there is no hope to affectively change the way we think about gender. My research is very closely aligned to Johnston’s (2005) notion of “the ways in which the production of knowledge in geography rests on gendered and sexualized binaries and [...] that certain forms of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality are operating to exclude and to ‘Other’ particular knowledges” (2005: 119) just as certain adult perspectives have sought to exclude other knowledges of age. She further notes that “the performativity of bodies is under consideration here because of the disruptive potential to the binaries man/woman and hetero/homo” (120).

Although there is an important relationship here between sexuality and gender, the main focus of this project is on the construction and performance of gender and the differences between biological ‘sex’ and cultural ‘gender’.¹

Although in most liberal feminist research, the concepts were used interchangeably to describe biological sex without consideration of the attached socially-prescribed characteristics, Rose (1993) contends that “[c]onstellations of systematic (but

¹ While I would like to have dealt with sexuality in my project, it seemed to be a difficult subject to broach with my research subjects and so much of the discussion of sex, gender and sexuality was bound up in specific place-based performances of gendered bodies in the context of the recreation center.
not necessarily coherent) ideas about, say, gender both construct gender as relational –
masculine and feminine – and also evaluate one gender over the another” (6). Sunderland
(2004) elaborates, noting that gender “entails any differences between women and men
being socially or culturally learned, mediated or constructed. Gender thus contrasts with
the biological essentialism of the term sex” (14). Cranny-Francis et al. (2003) suggest that
“[g]ender divides humans into two categories: male and female” and that “it privileges
the male over the female” (1). They continue that “[g]ender operates as a set of
hierarchically arranged roles in modern society which makes the masculine half of the
equation positive and the feminine negative” (1-2). While I agree with their theorization
about the hierarchical arrangement and the relationship of gender to notions of
masculinity and femininity, I would argue that the suggestion that equating female with
feminine (and male with masculine) belies their true argument which is that there is an
“historical and cross-cultural constructedness of femininity and masculinity, of gender
itself” (3).

Most of their entire discussion is centered around the construction of biological
sex which they point out “is part and parcel of the establishment in certain Western
cultures of a battle of the sexes, of a binary opposition, which makes this distinction and
mutual exclusiveness between men and women seem natural” (4). This conceptualization,
for the most part, holds true to what I feel is an accurate depiction of the interplay
between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ except for the interchange of the words themselves. They
suggest that gender is contingent upon the male/female binary and sex relies on the
difference between a man and a woman. While I do not inherently disagree, I feel that
most literature continues to observe the understanding that sex is related to the fe/male
categories and gender is ascribed to notions of man and woman. Gregson et al (1997: 49)
support this, explaining that “feminist geographers have for the most part argued that
gender is a social construction which draws on certain aspects of biological sex. Sex itself
is assumed to be a natural category, based on biological difference”.

Whatever the purpose, the distinction between sex and gender seems to suggest
that there are different ways of using language to construct social differences. They
suggest that any “proof of the existence of two sexes is on the body, in the body; it is the
body” (Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 5). Johnston (2005) continues that an important key to
this research is the study of the body in space. She expresses that “[t]he body has become
a site of intense enquiry, with much of the discussion centered on multiple
understandings of masculinity and femininity and on thinking of bodies and spaces in
non-dichotomous ways” (125). This sentiment is one that is explicitly informative to my
research, though its history lies in the deeper roots laid out by Rose (1993) in her
challenge of the discipline of geography to recognize differences in sex and gender. Of
central concern to discussions of difference in sex and gender is how these are
constructed, or produced, and performed, or reproduced. Cranny-Francis et al. (2003:
139) use several forms of visual analysis to explore the dimensions of performance and
likens it to a “masquerade” of sorts. They note that a certain type of performance can be
“sometimes overtly and deliberately shocking because of the way it reveals one of the
mechanisms by which the sexes are constructed – physical appearance and (self-
)presentation” (170). Given that we have begun to consider sport in terms of its varying
layers of performance, it becomes clear that sports re-creations require certain behaviors consistent with where they occur.

Specifically, one example of what is fundamental to a particular space (or place) is an accompanying dress code which is both politically and socially expected. Therefore, constructions of aged and gendered bodies require a specific presentation to be acceptable under different spatial and temporal circumstances. McDowell (1999: 42) notes more broadly that “[q]uestions of bodily style, gestures and presentation and the ways in which these are constructed and enforced” are important to a feminist politics. The relationship between subjectivity and performativity is especially drawn together here by looking at the way sex and gender are not necessarily a fixed identity that defines us but rather they can be manipulated to allow us to express ourselves in various conventional and unconventional ways – something that is fundamental to the discussion of youth, gender and sport with many groups but especially to college students.

Sunderland (2004) develops this relationship between subjectivity and performativity explaining that there is a fundamental level of agency at work in our ability to perform our subjectivities. However, she notes that the construction of sexed and gendered discourses through talk and written texts can allow or constrain our ability to perform depending on our experiences (23). Furthermore, discursive constructions extend to the individual scale, in which the importance of the body in sex and gender performance is reinforced. Teather (1999: 7) directs us to see that not only do “[o]ur bodies occupy space, but they are also spaces in their own right”. Johnston (2005) further suggests we consider the idea of “[t]he messy body” and how it is “Othered and
feminized” (126). Quoting Longhurst (2001a: 23), Johnston (2005) notes that ‘the messy body’ is one that in performance “breaks its [sexed and gendered] boundaries” (126) by expelling some essence of itself. Focusing specifically on the body from a feminist perspective, it is possible to explore how through the complex arrangements of age, gender, play and performance, bodies negotiate and create the spatiality of belonging which I will discuss in the next section.

Challenging play, performance, recreation and belonging

There seems to be space for a conceptual extension from physical education promoted in the institution of school to the fitness centers provided by higher education. In a discussion of children’s activities in public schools, Thorne (1997: 1) immediately relates the idea that “boys’ and girls’ activities divide in a familiar geography of gender”. She continues this discussion by emphasizing that notions of the social construction of gender and the development of children fail to realize that “[c]hildren’s interactions are not preparation for life; they are life itself” (3). In these two statements, she helps communicate that while we are as children socialized by adults, we are simultaneously living these relationships and being shaped by day to day experiences which continues throughout our life. She further challenges commonly held assumptions suggested in previous sections regarding how age and gender subjectivities are created by structures of power (6). She expounds:

“power is central to the social relations of gender. Both boys and girls operate from a position of subordination to adults; age relations, like those of class and race, alter the dynamics of gender. However, boys – who control more space, more often violate girls’ activities, and treat
girls as contaminating – participate in larger structures of male dominance. Girls often contest boys’ exertion of power, and other lines of inequality add to the complexity” (159).

This argument is central to my thesis because of the way it connects age, gender, performance and socio-spatial exclusion. Though it discusses these in the context of children, I feel that there is adequate research to suggest that these processes continue on regardless of age.2

Similarly, Messner (1992, 2002 and 2007) has explored the dimensions of gender and age as they relate to sport. Though I am not specifically dealing with sport as he conceives it, that is the institutionalized and commercialized forms of it, in the overall framework of this thesis, I feel that his work has contributed extensively to the relationship between gender and age. And, I believe that it can be used as a vehicle to express the ways in which gender roles and subjectivities transcend the misconceptions of age created by the adult/child binary. Specifically, Messner (2002: 2) focuses on three dimensions of gender construction asking questions about children’s involvement in team sports as they relate to “social interaction” and gender performativity, “structural context” and institutionalized gendered and sexed segregation, and “cultural symbol” and how “shared immersion in popular culture (and their differently gendered locations in this immersion)” suggest differences between boys and girls.

However, much like the simple dualisms of masculinity/femininity and adult/child that I have explored previously, it should be noted that the performance/play (or

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2 Specifically in the context of this project, it is readily apparent that the structure of the gym itself functions as a disciplining, masculine adult body that is regulated and supported by all users of the KSURWC regardless of the subject’s apparent sex/gender identity.
play/performance) dichotomy is really an articulation of a set of discursive constructions about activities that are contingent and contextual. For instance, while play is most often conceived in terms of children’s activities in sport and exercise (Harker 2005; Hemming 2007) and performance – more specifically, performativity – is associated with an adult’s gender subject position (Butler 1990), they really offer us a way of seeing how we engage in different types of transgressive and transformative behaviors to overcome problems of exclusion.

As with age, play and performance should be understood as a becoming; instead of thinking about the development or progression from childhood to adulthood and from playfulness to being performance driven, it is better to think in terms of the complex negotiation between playful and performing bodies of different ages. And like gendered subjectivities, we should not think of play and performance activities as being mutually exclusive, rather we should think about the ways different masculinities and femininities challenge each other and how this affects our interaction and participation in different recreative activities. Ultimately, this line of thinking helps return us to Bale’s (2003a) notion of re-creation. As an example, our interaction in a specific kind of sport/fitness place may require us to re-create our bodies so as to optimize our gender performance (e.g. demonstrate our masculinity) or our participation in another activity space will challenge or allow us to play differently and re-create our bodies in other ways (e.g. playing volleyball in a racquetball court). Play and performance as recreation instead of as levels of sports activities are about fitness; not fitness as a measure of health, but as a measure of belonging – as a measure of fitting into a place. Every physical activity is a
re-creating of the body to fit the time-space specificity of place whether one is exercising alone or playing a team sport.

It is my opinion then that because of how specifically spaces of re-creation are made, it is where differences in identity are most manifest and material. It is where transgression between achievement/performance and experience/play is most likely to occur. It is where places of play and performance shift spatially and temporally. It is where bodies go to become more different or more the same, where they can engage in a shaping and reshaping of place/body/identity. It is where identity encounters difference and is forced to stabilize space/place in order to limit the becomings of others. It is also where sports geography can be opened up further to critical understandings of age and gender.

**Sports Geographies of Fitness, Re-creation**

Fluid spaces, fluid bodies: post-structuralism and geography

Thus far I have suggested that geography is best considered as the study of relations of people and space. I have also noted that in the history of geography the people-space relationship has been argued primarily through what I have termed human-centric and place-specific study. In doing that, I argued that most sports geographies have for too long been overly concerned with ideas about humans and the construction and representations of place(s). Furthermore, this concern for human-place interaction led many sports geographers to conclude that recreation activities were not as important as achievement oriented sports. Because of that I suggest that sports geography, a heavily (if
not exclusively) masculine-dominated field, needs to connect with and expand through recent theoretical shifts in children’s, young people’s and feminist geographies. I should note that this relationship is not unidirectional; instead, I want to make it clear that these other theoretical and topical subfields as well as the entire discipline of geography would benefit from engaging with the rich historical literature of the sports-geographic body of knowledge. Not only that, but by engaging in this literature, other geographies would gain a perspective on play and performance that is missing in discussions of physical activities, the performing arts and theories of place. However, I have also made sure to pay attention to authors in recent literature (especially feminist literature) who contest the ideas of static or fixed identities, bodies and places. It is here that I would like to fully open up and discuss the influence of post-structural thought on my understanding of geography and how it affects the development of my research from this point on.

“The term ‘poststructuralist’ is, like all language, plural. It does not have one fixed meaning” argues Weedon (1997). Similarly, Blunt and Wills (2000: 112) suggest that “poststructuralism seeks to disrupt meanings that are assumed to be natural and taken for granted” and furthermore it “also view[s] power relations as diffuse throughout society, positioning individuals in relation to each other as well as in relation to the social body”. Revisiting the way I have framed children’s and feminist geographies and the way they expanded on how we have thought of age and gender, it becomes clear that a solid line of poststructuralist thinking has been evident throughout this chapter. And while there are many authors labeled as poststructuralist, the author who most influenced this project is Michel Foucault. In the following sections, I will explain how his work, and
others working from his perspective, contributes to my understanding of social and spatial relations.

Foucault, discipline and space in the re-creation center

Although Foucault’s impact on my work has been the less significant of the two authors I have mentioned, his framing of spatial relations undergirds many of the ideas I have previously referenced about gender, discourse and identity. More specifically though his analysis of the disciplining of bodies (Foucault 1995; Vertinsky and Bale 2004; Vertinsky and McKay 2004) has directly contributed to my perception of the material arrangement of the Kent State University Student Recreation and Wellness Center (KSUSRWC). In this regard, much work relating to space and the self has been conducted which explores a Foucauldian analysis of sport, exercise and body technologies (Crossley 2006; Frew and McGillivray 2005; Markula 1995; Markula and Pringle 2006; McCormack 1999; Spielvogel 2002; Wesely 2001). A more detailed sketching of this literature will be applied in the first analysis section of chapter five where I discuss the results of my time doing participant observations and explore a visual analysis of the KSUSRWC.

Within this discussion, I explain from my observations how and why specific individuals (designated by their age and gender) engage in inclusionary and exclusionary activities and how those activities are reinforced by the construction of space. As Murdoch (2006: 30) notes, Foucault “was interested in observing how subjects and objects come into being in the context of specific discursive formations”. Furthermore, in
this I re-engage with ideas about the discursive nature of space/place-making by thinking through the sports geographies of John Bale and reframe his work through his description of Critical Humanism.

**Conclusion**

In the next section, I explain in more detail how the varying methodologies and frames of analysis I have briefly mentioned have helped me uncover differences in the experiences of the KSUSRWC. These methodologies do not stand independent of the literature I have described above, but are consistent with the epistemological framework I have laid out here. That is they are appropriate for a feminist and poststructural argument that recognizes the importance of the subjectivity and positionality of the author, seeks to describe and explore experiences rather than produce ‘truths’, and offers a political agenda for transformation of both the theory and practice of sports geographies.
Chapter 4

Trials, Troubles and Triumphs in the Design of First-time Qualitative Research

“Our current ability to be critically reflexive on the relations between Self and Other in the production of geographic knowledge is shaped in part by the long-standing practices of exploration and observation, talking with people about their places, and the quest for contextual knowledge.” – Meghan Cope (2010)

Introduction

Though it may seem that I may have put the methodological ‘cart-before-the-horse’ by using an expressly different methodology (i.e. ‘autoethnography’) in chapter two, I hold that chapter in distinction with this section because it was meant to clarify and illustrate my particular ‘ways of knowing’ while this chapter is more about ‘ways of doing’ sports geography. Specifically, in this chapter I describe the problems I had as a first-time researcher in designing an effective empirical project, carrying out said project, and modifying the project in order to provide some semblance of ‘data’ and ‘results’. To better explain these experiences, I discuss through the context of feminist methodologies the creation of the project and its ultimate contribution to this research. However, I feel that the best starting point for this discussion begins by addressing early concerns I had about doing qualitative research with/about young people as a male from a feminist perspective.
Trying to Do Sports Geographies with Young People

Almost all sports studies in geography have been about people over the age of eighteen and almost all children’s geographies have nothing to do with sports so it seemed like a natural place to attempt to bring the two together. With that in mind, I began by designing a research project that would explore how class differences affect gendered social and spatial exclusion in the participation of youth sports at local recreation centers. During this initial design, several important issues came to light about my ability to perform this type of research.

First, and foremost, among these issues was that as a first-time researcher it would be extremely difficult for me to gain access to ‘sensitive’ individuals like children or the (dis)abled without working with/through someone with prior experience. Secondly, even if I had been able to gain approval for this work, I would have to find a way to gain consent from the children’s parents through a series of ‘gatekeepers’ including the children themselves. This proved to be a problematic idea because on some accounts I would have been approaching children when they were not being supervised, explain to them the project, offer them an information packet and hope that they would return with permission to speak with them and their parents. Finally, the third problem I had in designing research to work with children was that I am a man. Upon further research, it became clear that my ‘male-ness’ could pose bigger problems in doing research on gender beyond the scope of working with children.

Furthermore and rather unfortunately, through these visible problems and perhaps many underlying others, I was forced to scrap certain aspects of this project and
transform it into a more manageable research topic that was more appropriate to my age, gender and research experience. To do this, I removed thinking specifically through issues of class difference because I was suddenly dealing with a group of people who on the surface had similar occupational (i.e. being a student) and financial backgrounds (i.e. using financial aid or parental funds). This was primarily because I chose to increase the age requirements of my research participants from 12-18 to 18-25+ in order to work with a more reliable and accessible research population by relocating the site to the Kent State University Student Recreation and Wellness Center. This affected my specific research design because while the topical framework of sports and young people’s geographies remained, my methodological and theoretical framework had to be adjusted to accommodate new aspects and new questions. As I previously noted though, by seemingly solving the first two problems of access and consent, I re-focused attention on how I would perform feminist research through my ‘masculine’ subjectivity.

**Doing, Living and Situating Pro-Feminist Masculinities**

Butz and Berg (2002: 90) suggest that “a feminism that refuses to accept the possibility that men might be active participants in the transformation of masculinity is both practically and theoretically problematic”. As hooks (2000: 70) points out, “[w]hat is and was needed is a vision of masculinity where self-esteem and self-love of one’s unique being forms the basis of identity”. Unfortunately, there are still those who question a male’s involvement in feminist studies as a subversive movement attempting to take-back an area of research which is out of the control of masculine hegemony.
While this fear is not without reason, it essentializes all masculine perspectives (e.g. subjectivities, postionalities) as participants in the reproduction of patriarchy something women are also capable of doing; however, “given the importance of contexts, relationships, and practices in both the (re)construction of masculinity and the way we come to understand the meanings of the term, it should be very clear that masculinity is both temporally and geographically contingent” (Berg and Longhurst 2003: 352).

Furthermore, it should be realized that not only are masculinities contextual and contingent, feminist masculinities, or at the least a pro-feminist male movement, can provide obvious benefits to a feminist research agenda. First among these is the potential to explore masculinities alternative to the particular hegemonic masculinity (i.e. sexism) that dominates gendered power relations in society (Messner 1996). Secondly, many alternative masculinities do not set out in an effort to replace hegemonic masculinity for the purposes of simply exchanging one type of oppression for another. Instead, they offer chances to explore masculine subjects’ convergences with different, ‘other’ subject positions such as class, race and sexuality (Messner 1990). A particular feminist masculinity within geography is interested in patriarchy’s “openings, routes into male privilege, and opportunities for forays beyond its borders” (Butz and Berg 2002: 101) in order to overcome the same types of stereotypes for men that women in lesser power positions suffer through.

Despite this proclaimed need to accept a feminist masculine position as legitimate, the importance of subjectivity, positionality and reflexivity should not be ignored in regards to the power men have in contrast to women in many social
circumstances. In addition, it should be noted that because of the precarious position male feminists have in doing gender research, the importance of establishing our subject positions in regards to the research participants needs to be even more explicit. Rose (1997: 307) argues that “[n]o feminist should produce knowledge that claims to have universal applicability to all women (or men)”. Furthermore, these claims can be countered by expressly acknowledging how we are situated in society, at large, and within the contexts of the academy and our research, specifically (Sidaway 2000).

Not only that, I believe as England (1994) does that “[w]e are differently positioned subjects with different biographies, we are dematerialized, disembodied entities” (84-5). Just as chapter two established my biography as an individual with a life immersed in the tradition of sports and chapter three contextualized me as a certain type of geographer, this chapter positions me as a twenty-five-year-old male feminist graduate student 3 in the thinking, performing and writing of this research. In that regard, my interpretations and representations of the particular information gathered by the following research methods is going to be tinted towards not only my understanding of sports and geography but also how and what I think about age, gender, ability and the body. This becomes particularly important in the next section as I describe further problems I had in conducting and changing my research of gender exclusion at the KSUSRWC.

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3 As of the time of this writing in 2009
Proposed Research Design: Easier Said Than Done

At the proposal stage of this project, I set out with three specific methodological tasks in mind: on-site participant observation, mixed-quantitative surveys, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The observational research section was laid out according to the procedures described by Laurier (2003) and Kearns (2005) which determines the observer’s role based on their level of immersion or participation in the environment. This method was then supposed to be supported through the use of a questionnaire survey technique to facilitate increased interaction between the researched and I, the observer (see Appendix B for original questionnaire draft). Through a combination of closed and open-ended questions (McGuirk and O’Neill 2005; McLafferty 2003) about understandings of gender, I intended to collect at least twenty-five complete surveys – with an intended $n$ of fifty – from undergraduate students at the KSUSRWC. From there, I would hopefully be able to gain the consent of ten individuals to participate in an audio-taped interview (Dunn 2005; Longhurst 2003) further explaining their experiences of exclusion in the KSUSRWC. All of these measures were intended to be conducted over the course of two-to-three months between June and August 2008. After gaining the permission of the KSUSRWC directors and the IRB of Kent State, I set out into the ‘field’ to collect my data. However, a half-hour into my project, the reality of ‘fieldwork’ set in. It occurred to me that shifting my role from fitness-center user to fitness-center researcher would have an important affect on my ability to do the research, but having never taken a qualitative methods course, I was totally unprepared for how difficult ‘doing’ research turned out to be.
While the observational portions of my research design didn’t change very dramatically, the rest of the project became decimated by inability to overcome my age, gender and occupational roles. To most of the people I encountered, I appeared to be (or at least I felt that way afterwards) some strange guy wasting their time with pointless questions. For some reason, my assumptions as a researcher never took into account my own subject position as a KSUSRWC member/user. When I would go to the fitness center, I would go when I had time and I didn’t want to spend that time standing around or talking to anyone other than those with whom I came.

Unfortunately, my transformation became quite clear over the weeks and months I spent attempting to get someone – anyone – interested in my project. It became increasingly difficult as the population of the fitness center increased in number following the beginning of the fall semester 2008. While I thought things would get easier it turned out that a larger number of people didn’t make my attempts any easier; in fact, it became more difficult because I was increasingly embarrassed and aware of my aging, out-of-shape body amongst the ‘fit’ undergraduate student population. This was further exacerbated by my (perceived) failure as a researcher to accomplish anything of importance. Instead of spending more time at the KSUSRWC, I began to withdraw from my research (see, e.g., Lofland et al. 2006); in effect, I became a product of my own project. I was allowing myself to be excluded on the basis of all the things I set out to understand. It then occurred to me that I couldn’t be the only one feeling this way, so I transformed the scope of the project.
Finding Success in Alternative Methodologies

After these initial experiences in the ‘field’, I decided to rethink my entire philosophy on the doing of the research. In fact, the setbacks described above prompted me to write chapter two as a personal narrative in order to help work my feelings into the overall design of the project in a more constructive way. Additionally, while I continued to conduct the observational research intermittently over the spring 2009 semester (which I will return to later), I crafted a research strategy that would allow me to overcome my fears and develop the ideas I had about non-traditional users of the fitness center. Though I attempted several more times – and succeeded once – to get interviews done ‘face-to-face’ with some of the undergraduate population, I realized it might be easier to focus on the 25+ age group that I had previously been uninterested in.

Electronic interviewing

After seriously considering the problems I’d been personally facing during my time at the fitness center, I contacted – by email – other graduate students whom I knew frequented the KSUSRWC. Per IRB regulations, in this email I included an introduction script, a consent form and a semi-structured interview form (see Appendices A and C). Furthermore, I expressed that they should fill out the consent form and turn it into me before proceeding with the interview. To further protect confidentiality, I requested that the respondents choose a pseudonym to be used later in the analysis.

Email interviews, while an emerging technique, are not an entirely new form of method in geographical or social science research. While ‘electronic interviewing’ or
electronic questionnaires have been primarily used for quantitative studies (see Fontana and Frey 2008), it is possible to use them to conduct in-depth qualitative research (Browne 2005; McCoyd and Schwaber Kerson 2006; Mahtani 2004). Worth (2008) notes that email interviews offer two specifically distinct advantages: candor and convenience. In both these regards, she found that people whom she invited to interview were able to take their time and thoughtfully answer the questions without the stress of a formal interview process. Furthermore, I found in my own use of the technique that interviewees were able to consistently provide information to seemingly uncomfortable questions perhaps knowing that no one was overhearing the conversation or that the interview form was specifically for my eyes only. An additional convenience of the method lies in the fact that the interviews are already transcribed with the exact content and in the precise context the interviewee stated the information.

Although the method did prove successful, it was not without its flaws. Out of 19 email interviews distributed, I only received 6 in return. Though I’m not entirely sure of the statistical significance of this, I felt confident that a 30% success rate in interview collection seemed appropriate given the scope of my project. Of the 6 participants, four were female and two were male ages ranging from 23-31. A more serious weakness of this method though was the wide range of depth of information in an interviewee’s responses; while some interviewees provided an abundant amount of details, others barely answered all 38 of the questions. Another weakness of the method I found was my inability to adjust questions due to sending out all of the emails simultaneously. However, I felt that because of the number of questions and their open-ended nature and
the ability for the participants to add any additional information, the electronic interviews were successful in providing a great deal of information that upon analysis demonstrated the multilayered nature of experiences at the KSUSRWC. Specifically, I found that the interviews provided interesting insights and sometimes direct contradictions to the perceived behavior of others using the KSUSRWC facilities. Because of this, I constructed the observational portion of the research in direct contrast to these interviews. I will describe the procedures of my semi-participant observation in the next section.

Observation

As I’ve previously mentioned, much of my observational ‘data’ collecting occurred between June 2008 and February 2009. As an inexperienced researcher, I didn’t know how to conduct a project with the appropriate amount of dedication necessary to achieve good results. Without any formal training, I found it difficult to take ‘good’ field notes or to understand what I should be taking field notes on/about. Even after reading several methodological books and articles, I found the issues latent in observational research and field note taking problematic. Furthermore, the type of environment at the KSUSRWC was not conducive to participation, observation and note-taking over extended periods of time. I often found myself bored, confused, overwhelmed or awkward depending on the duration and extent of activities during my periods of observation/participation. Not to mention because I was conducting this research in addition to class-work and teaching, I found I could not always maintain a set schedule for attending the recreation center. Instead, I went when I could and took notes when I
felt comfortable. The notes I took primarily consisted of indiscriminate jottings, post-observation analysis and memory of particular moments in my participation as a fitness center user.

Unfortunately, this part of my empirical endeavor turned out to be a nightmare. However, I did not come away empty-handed from this experience. Although I do not have ‘thick descriptions’ of being immersed in the field doing extensive ethnography for an extended period of time, I am able to draw broader interpretations within this research because attending the KSUSRWC was so much a part of my everyday-life activities while I attended Kent State University. Furthermore, part of my observational data related not only to the individuals using the facilities but also to the facility itself. Through the use of observation analysis of the material spaces of the fitness center and visual analysis of pictures (Rose 2007) I took of the on-site map, I was able to place activities/bodies to specific spaces within the fitness center. While I will include these mappings and pictures in the next chapter, I want to briefly discuss the types of analysis I used to work through the information I gathered both from the interviews and during my time observing and participating at the KSUSRWC.

**Conclusion: Observation and Narrative Analysis**

Because of the many difficulties I faced in building and conducting a successful qualitative research design, I realized that my project would need to be more focused on critically analyzing what resources were available (i.e. observation notes and selected interviews) and then working that information through a more theoretical discussion of a
critical sports geography. While I do not feel the empirical part of this project was a failure, I recognize the limitations such a limited amount of data/information might pose in conducting an in-depth analysis. However, the information obtained reflects two distinctly unique types of perspectives on how embodied sports geographies of recreation occur at the KSUSRWC. Therefore by treating them as competing and complementary units of analysis or discourses, I am able to uncover linkages between the ‘realities’ and interpretations of my observations and the alternative actual experiences of the participants in the interview process.

The observations are analyzed based on my perceptions and experiences with and of others activities (Sands 2002: 80), and those perceptions and experiences are expressed by a discussion of ‘zones of play’, ‘zones of performance’ and ‘zones of transgression’ in relation to the pictures of the KSUSRWC. This analysis is further expounded on through a theoretical re-reading of the fitness center in terms of the literature on the ‘disciplining of bodies’ mentioned in the previous chapter. On the other hand, the interview responses are treated as narratives (see, e.g., Chase 1995; Riessman 1993; Waitt 2008) which describe a participant’s general history of physical activity and their current (or former) use of the recreation center. These narratives are organized around a set of themes and are not only compared and contrasted to one another, but they are also posed as alternative understandings of the spaces of re-creation in the KSUSRWC. In this way, the interviews are organized around these themes as if the responses and discursive constructions provided by each individual are in conversation with the others so that similarities and
differences become explicit. Both of these sets of analyses – observation and interviews – will be discussed further in the next chapters.
Chapter 5

Analysis – Fitness-in-Place, Transgression and Re-creational Discipline

Critical Humanism in Sports Geographic Theory and Practice

As referenced in previous chapters, my project – as situated in the dominant paradigm of Bale-ian sports geographies – is theorized in the context of a “critical humanist” discourse. This is done on two accounts: first to address the way John Bale frames critical humanism in the context of space/place which I have already explained in chapter three, and second to point how this discourse competes with critical sports geographies working from a poststructural feminist perspective. With this in mind, I want to begin the following discussion as laid out in chapter three by expanding the discussion of space/place as the geographic concept that anchors how Bale understands the definition of critical humanism which we will see is far more nuanced, complicated and troubling than previous humanist discourses in geographic thought. If space/place is the node on which the Bale-ian sports geographic theory is built, then the subject (in this case the “human being”) is the central social concept which underpins any critical, anti- or post humanist analysis. After discussing this theory of space/place through the lens of critical humanism as explained by John Bale, I will turn to sports geographies that work from a Foucauldian analysis and describe how these two theories help to understand my time observing the Kent State University Student Recreation and Wellness Center (hence forward referred to as “the Rec”.

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Bale (2004: 4) working through his experiences as an athlete and an academic, notes in his fondness for humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan that “Humanists learn to read between the lines and to take note of not what is said so much as what is left unsaid. This study highlights the tensions, ambiguities and complexities that lie beneath the certainties and concreteness often associated with the common-place notion of running.” While Bale specifically targets running in this book, he points out how important motion and sense is to the world of sport. That is, sport cannot simply be measured by observation alone but must be interpreted through the human relations that occur in space and make place. So far this description accounts for the humanist aspect of sports, but what is critical about this? Bale explains:

“Humanistic approaches have been criticized for focusing on the individual, the privileging of human agency, and fetishizing experience and subjectivity. However, the emergence of a *critical* humanism, by recognizing the presence of ideology and emphasizing contradictions and tensions, is able to accept notions such as ‘sense of place’ may be constrained by a variety of structures – social, political and economic” (5; original emphasis).

This instance of the phrase “critical humanism” is important and while walking a tenuous line theoretically helps to explain some of my own contradictions in previous chapters in trying to navigate what has been described as an eclectic use of social theory⁴. What is most important however is simply to understand the position Bale is taking by invoking critical humanism with critical sports geographies – there is room and need for understanding both individual experience and how these experiences produce and are reproduced by social relations.

⁴ For a more inclusive discussion of the ways in which space and place have been combined in geography despite claims of eclecticism see Agnew (2005).
While what Bale describes as critical humanism is nothing new theoretically – essentially finding a balance between structural and agency based approaches – it is important looking through his work to note that his basis for this argument is a combination of humanist geographies by the aforementioned Tuan and Edward Relph as well as a Lefebvre-ian Marxist materialism. For that reason, I have chosen to situate this portion of my geographical theory and discussion of space/place in this awkward mish-mash. Bale (2003b) negotiates space and place in this context by explaining that the world of sport and achievement is divided from recreation and play. In this way sport takes on ‘abstract space’ (see Lefebvre 1991) and turns a landscape of place into one of placelessness. The humanistic notion of experience is essentially erased by the social structures that create sports spaces – science, rationality, competition. He explains, “the logic of achievement sport seeks to eliminate place (a unique area or peopled space) and replace it with the space – or ‘non-place’ or placelessness” (Bale 2003b: 83). Furthermore, as discussed in chapter three, the logic of achievement is accompanied by a growth in the seriousness of competition (as opposed to the fun of play and recreation) and “With the growing seriousness of the game came the growing seriousness of the landscape in which it took place. Modern achievement sport is a world of geometry” (83).

From this perspective, sport takes on the character as I have explained in previous chapters of concrete or abstract space – a geography to be quantified that stands as separate from other spaces and is removed from the experience of people and their feelings. And in order to maintain this geography, boundaries are erected to maintain the purity of placeless space. Citing Robert Sack (1986), Bale (2003b) addresses how the
concept of territoriality is used to segment space, maintain order and impose power. Working through this, one could say that the logic of space itself is to allow for unfettered movement, progress and objectivity: “each space where a performance may be achieved should be the same – exactly the same” (84-85). Mish-mashing Tuan’s (1977: 6) understanding of the dialectic of space and place into the conversation further illustrates this point, “if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.” Thus the logic of space, sport and performance is one that cannot allow for the uniqueness of place.

As bodies are kept moving in the performance of sports, fitness, recreation and even at times play, they can be quantified, measured and reproduced. Like the bodies in motion contained within it, “Space is a resource that yields wealth and power when properly exploited” (Tuan 1997: 58). We must be careful not to make the classic mistake that is bound up in discussions of all forms of humanism including those that label themselves critical; by prioritizing place – spaces imbued with human meaning – and neglecting the possibilities bound up in the freedom to move across and within space, we tend to reify a certain type of place making. Feminist geographers have long argued that patriarchy and the male gaze have contributed to making places that while full of meaning and emotion (e.g. the home) do not adequately express the tension between alternate or competing subjectivities. In other words, they do not address the politics of place. The reification of place does not account for the way place-making itself can be as dominating as those spaces emptied of meaning (i.e. the ‘non-place’). However, we can
be reassured, or terrified depending on our perspective, that in a general sense, as space becomes occupied, as it melds with intersecting subjects, bodies and competing trajectories, power becomes diffuse and “under the gaze of another, [the individual] becomes one object among many in the room. He senses a loss of power to order things in space from his unique perspective” (59). How that power is dispersed and in what ways it is deployed is fundamental to understanding all types of sports spaces.

It is here, in my opinion, that we encounter the situation in all gymnasia and precisely in the context of the Rec. That is, while other sports spaces function almost unidirectionally from the spectators (crowd) to the performers (the athletes), fitness centers are an example of how space and place is produced to attend to larger social structures which dictate the simultaneous monitoring of others and a continuous performance of gender, sexuality, race, age, ability and other social behaviors. However, the commonality of this shared experience also leaves room for the possibility of transgression, remaking place, and re-creating the body. Cresswell (1996: 13) explains “Places are duplicitous in that they cannot be reduced to the concrete or the ‘merely ideological’; rather they display an uneasy and fluid tension between them.” That tension between what we physically expect from a space and how we socially occupy it lies in what determines whether someone or something is ‘in-place’ or ‘out-of-place’.

Being in or out of place is defined by the disciplinary power that emerges from making one place distinct from another by a series of rules or spatial codes. Contrary to the notion that place is merely where one may rest or pause in the Tuanian humanist sense, there are strict guidelines which manage who may pause when and where. While
predicting all the spatial codes that go along with being allowed ‘in-place’ may be impossible, it is often more obvious when something is ‘out-of-place. Cresswell (1996: 22) continues, “The occurrence of “out-of-place” phenomena leads people to question behavior and define what is and is not appropriate for a particular setting.” Whether intentional in the performative sense (i.e. to provoke, invoke, evoke) or not, ‘out-of-place’ behavior is often interpreted as transgressive or resistive though the two function very differently.

Transgression is not always intentional and many times may even be accidental. This is an important distinction because in the context of sports and gymnasia, getting acquainted with the spatial codes of fitness and recreation (re-creating the body to fit into place, as discussed earlier) is fundamental to having the body required to be in place. While it is possible to change oneself or ones identity to fit into specific social situations, it is much more difficult to change ones gender or race than it is to adapt the body through fitness and re-creation to literally be fit enough to be allowed into a particular place. I do not mean to diminish the difficulties or differences in ability and physiology that help particular people achieve certain body types more easily than others because someone with the resources of an Olympic athlete will obviously be more capable of achievement than a “9-to-5” minimum wage mother, but in general, the body’s fitness can be managed and recreated to be acceptable almost exclusively in the environments in which it is trying to fit in-place. I belabor this point because I want to make it explicitly clear that because the gymnasiun both functions to keep bodies ‘out-of-place’ all the while providing the means to help them become ‘in-place’. It is exactly for this reason
that gender codes (among other identity markers) are so important to the maintenance of the disciplinary power that socially and spatially excludes different people from participation.\footnote{To put this into the critical humanist’s language: gymnasia operate to provide both the structure to maintain bodies and the agency to transform them.}

This desire to exclude emerges from what Sibley (1995) refers to as the process of abjection – identifying that which is different and then distancing oneself from it. In one manner of speaking, it is “the urge to make separations, between clean and dirty, ordered and disordered, ‘us’ and ‘them’, that is to expel the abject” (8). Specifically, he notes that this is a feature of Western consumptive cultures (as a byproduct of the Capitalist means of production) and in terms of body re-creating, no activity is more related to this type of culture than exercising in which one makes every part of themselves something to expel – something to lose (e.g. pounds, calories, fat). Sibley continues, “Maintaining the purity of the self, defending the boundaries of the inner body, can be seen as a never-ending battle against residues – excrement, dead skin, sweat and so on, and it is a battle that has wider culture significance” (8). From this perspective, gymnasia function as a crucible in which bodies go to burn away their undesirable residues and to distance themselves from those who can pollute them. Recalling the discussion of identities from chapter three, the process of abjection relies on exactly the type of categorical binary thinking that feminism has fought against. Speaking in essentialist terms, masculine identities historically have sought to shed themselves of the impurities of the female body, adults who have learned good hygiene are removed from the dirtiness of childhood, and the
rationality of serious sports and quantified performance is separated from the fluidity and fun of play.

While this is a rather generic set of distinctions, it serves to illustrate how people group together and the way that spatial distancing plays a role in social relations. No matter how well borders are policed socially and spatially, appropriate distance is not always a guarantee. As with Tuan’s comments earlier about crowding space and the loss of power, identity formations can be transgressed as well. In each binary coupling there is a liminal space, what Sibley (1995: 33) refers to as “zones of ambiguity”. These zones of ambiguity or transition in terms of moving bodies are spaces which do not always adhere to the strict boundaries of identity but they are also the spaces where individuals are most visibly judged for how they appear. From my observations at the Rec, I have generated a series of computer drawn maps that roughly illustrate the ways in which places of performance (in the achievement sense), ambiguity and transition, and finally play and recreation are differentiated based on the way people generally used the space though this belies the fact that these spaces are more fluid than they appear.

Observations of Place-making and Fitness-in-Place

Beginning with the entrance to the Rec, there is a clear delineation of ‘in-place’ and ‘out-of-place’ behaviors at the macro scale which notably is sectioned off by the gate and monitoring station that lets people pass into and out of the fitness areas above and
The most interesting facet of my observation time here was that most people who waited in the area outside the gate were in plain clothes and often appeared to be guests watching basketball games below or were office workers in the outer areas of the Rec. Noting this, I tried two different approaches during my failed attempts to get interview candidates here: one time wearing plain clothes which made me seem an outsider and another time wearing workout clothes which may have been more bizarre because I didn’t look like I had been working out. In general, this front area indicated on the maps as “The Entrance” was basically a place where few people gathered and most were either coming into or leaving (See Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

Figure 5.1: KSUSRWC Entry Level Map.

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6 The Kent State Recreation and Wellness Center consists of three floors with the entrance on the middle level, an indoor track on the top level and most workout equipment and sports facilities on the lower level. I have chosen a color scheme that certainly has semiotic overtones in that red is used for areas of performance and sport, yellow is used for zones of ambiguity and green for play and recreation. This was partially a way to demonstrate the ease of access and supposed ‘intensity’ of each place so that red is associated with difficulty, stop or risk, yellow with caution and yield, and green with ease, open and go.
One area that was useful after gaining access to the Rec was what I’ve labeled the “Observation Deck” because it allowed viewing access to certain workout areas and a workspace from which to take notes (designated by the black arrows which show the ability to look down level). However, the location of this area and the workstation computers was somewhat disturbing because I could visibly cast my gaze on people working out and they didn’t know I was watching them. The entire process of note-taking from this area took on a problematic approach and so while I would return here to write down some observations of my time working out, I stopped using this area to “spy” on people clandestinely. This was probably a valuable idea in the long term because my most meaningful observations came from my actual time participating in the fitness center activities myself. My participation in re-creating my own body helped me be more aware of how other bodies were fitting into or out-of-place.
While I took many of my notes on the entry level, I didn’t spend as much time working out personally or participating on this level because the rooms were very specific and often crowded due to the intimate nature of the activities involved and most of the space to the left of the entrance taken up by a viewing deck overlooking the basketball court. At the far end next to the classroom was a ping pong table that was rarely occupied and seemed of little interest to me during my observations, but it was uniquely mentioned as a feature that was out-of-place to some of my interviewees who very briefly suggested it was ‘not very serious’. While I never experienced the classes offered at the Rec because they had very specific schedules, targeted specific groups and required an additional membership cost, I have labeled this area as one of performance and serious sport. This is primarily because of the structure and organization of the types of classes (e.g. kickboxing, spinning, ‘boot camp’, and dance) and that they were featured as instructional activities led by a paid professional. Hence while an individual may not have seen the activities as serious, the function of the classes was one in which individuals paid in order to achieve a set outcome over the course of several sessions. Finally, the last area of note for now on the entry level was the “Circuit Room” which was designated as following a series of exercises featuring use of weight machines, cardio machines and calisthenics.

This room was one of the first places I noticed the ambiguity in the behavior of its participants. While many women used this room because of the emphasis on calorie burning and weight loss in circuit activities, I also noticed that when the room was less occupied, people would do the activities out of order at their own leisure. On the other
hand, when the room was in heavy use, older men, slim, less-muscled younger men and more ‘fitness-oriented’ appearing women would balk at the prospect of having to wait for someone who wasn’t using the room in its prescribed way. There was a direct conflict in which one perspective saw the room as having a specific achievement oriented focus and another which treated the room as an extension or overflow from the weight machines downstairs. The flexibility of the room when it was empty allowed for a level of transgression because of the intimacy and closed off nature of the room which was accessible and visible only from a single entryway unlike the areas downstairs which were more open to scrutiny. Simultaneously, this privacy contributed to the obvious nature of ‘out-of-place’ behavior when crowded and led to self-policing – something that was even more prevalent in the lower level of the Rec.

![KSUSRWC Upper Level Map](image)

Figure 5.3: KSUSRWC Upper Level Map.
Before moving onto the bottom floor of the Rec which is by far the most important area of study, I want to discuss very briefly the upper level which primarily serves as a zone of ambiguity because its main function is as an indoor track (See Figures 5.3 and 5.4). Aside from the track there is a very serious core (i.e. abdomen and back) training area where individuals use Swiss balls to perform various calisthenics to the far side of the track and some older broken-down cardio equipment that tends to be used indiscriminately by a large group of people because it has the best view of the entire Rec. Specifically, I’ve noticed that people (myself included) use this equipment because of its privacy or because they can leisurely use the equipment while watching others exercise. However, the track remains the central focus of the upper level because it both a source of extreme performance and casual – even possibly playful – use. As a lifelong runner, the track was a difficult area for me to ‘objectively’ observe because most of my thoughts were colored by own experiences (read: frustration) with casual runners and walkers.

Figure 5.4: KSURWC Upper Level Map with mock-up.
Most of the time that I spent using the track was during the winter months when it was too cold to run outside so I would want to perform my running and then leave – something I could sense from others that I recognized as ‘runners’. Because running on a track especially one with only four lanes is a group experience unlike most other fitness activities, the sharing of space becomes particularly difficult when crowded. The serious nature of running on a track for a set time, pace or distance makes it a much more achievement and performance oriented pursuit than say for example a free run on a trail. While most runners will be courteous to others runners and often to those using the space ‘correctly’ from their perspective, serious runners have no tolerance for playful or casual behavior that interferes with their workouts – this includes those walking as a warm-up or cool-down. I have witnessed, and probably participated in, the aggressive behavior that attempts to mark space with the power of ability. Runners, particularly those with good endurance and speed, will often push past large groups of people walking on the track, run behind people who walk in the running lane, or even sneer at those with less capability. I remember during one of my own runs that I practically ran a group of children off the track because they were shifting lanes without paying attention to the direction for the day. Another time I saw a duo of runners who were very clearly trying to keep pace with each other nearly trip and fall because they were more focused on staying together than avoiding someone running slower than them. Although these may seem anecdotal, the track – perhaps because of the intensity associated with the constant

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7 The direction of the track changed depending on the day of the week in order to prevent a condition known as iliotibial band syndrome (ITBS) which is caused by putting pressure on one leg more than another, for example from running on a banked surface like an indoor track.
motion of running – is one of the most obvious places where identities clash in a very visible way.

Runners often have slimmer body types especially in the case of men who if they run at all tend to run individually. Men who ran also tended to be more insular and aggressive towards all users of the track. Women who use the track tend to run slower or walk with a partner and seem oblivious to other runners when using it socially. While the track represents a space used ubiquitously by all age groups, each age group tends to use the track in a different way. Older men run on the track slowly but still often alone like their younger counterparts while older women tend to exclusively use the track to walk – in all my time exercising at the Rec, I never noticed a woman who wasn’t of college age running on the track. Another age identity that stands out is that the track tends to be the only place where children represent a large enough group to be noticed; I do not know if this is because policy does not allow them on the equipment downstairs or if it is the ambiguous nature of the track that makes it more acceptable for kids to be present. Older people, children and women using the track to socialize because of their difference in capability and interest in the track represent by far the greatest ‘challenge’ to the norms of the space.

From my position as a runner, this still serves as a source of irritation, but as a critical feminist, I realize the inherent bias in my masculine performance oriented identity. The track because it is more open both literally and figuratively to different socio-spatial uses should be one of the few places where community may be fostered in the Rec, but in general, the purpose of gymnasia in productive societies is generally not
to offer a sense of community. It is where bodies go to re-create to make their self fit into place in society as a whole. Furthermore, the nature of running with the seemingly “everyone can do this” way it tends to represent itself leads to a controversial use of space when bodies are competing between performance and play. While personally and professionally it would be enjoyable to write a dissertation on the culture of running in the United States, the use of track space, and how the running body tends to be the spectacle by which groups (e.g. races, nations, sexes) have been represented in major sporting events, let it be enough for this thesis to suggest that the track represents one of the most contested places in all the Rec.

In contrast to this, my experience observing the sports areas (Indoor Soccer Arena and Basketball Volleyball Courts) of the Rec were usually unimpressive and led to my labeling of these areas as zones of ambiguity because despite my personal time spent playing dodgeball, soccer, volleyball and basketball, I noticed almost no discernible legibility to the types of bodies that used these areas. Sometimes there would be casual groups playing pick-up games that were co-sex, other times serious organized basketball games participated in largely by groups of skinny young men, but most of the time the areas were empty or sparsely filled with a few friends just “shooting hoops”. The only times I noticed an increase in the exclusion of a particular group (women) and focus on performance was during intramural basketball leagues when the area became partitioned and dominated by an aggressive participation in sport (See Figures 5.5 and 5.6).
From a geographical perspective, this was fascinating because while the space remained open and unbounded at most hours of the day and times of the year, the basketball courts would be sectioned off to make three identical spaces to achieve the standardization needed for fair competition. Usually this resulted in the exclusion of female groups who were shooting around or practicing volleyball. In terms of the identities, the most skewed aspect of the sports areas was the tendency towards young people to occupy the space. Unlike many other areas of the gym where there was at least a relative balance between young people (presumably students) and older people (presumably community members and faculty), the courts were exclusively youth-centric – a feature of the ability required for performance and achievement oriented sport.
One of the areas downstairs that seemed to be the most play-oriented on a regular basis were the racquetball courts outlined in green across from the basketball courts. These small intimate courts while visible from the front and above were largely soundproof and were usually occupied by groups of people casually engaged in racquetball or a variety of invented sports such as wall-based volleyball. This was the one area in the entirety of the gym that appeared to have no gender or age distinctiveness and was totally open for all to play, but it was also a place where larger bodies were able to participate in sport without perhaps the visibility and intensity of the basketball courts. Not only that, but the types of games played in the racquetball courts are open to a wider variety of body types and abilities because movement is less of an issue. In this case, the
Tuanian notion of pause and rest appears to be an accurate description of the intimacy of
this type of play place. It is at the least an example of the way that place can be made at
the smallest scale even when one is moving around or just standing in place with another
person playing a game. However, what is most distinct about all of the places I’ve
discussed so far besides their gender, age and ability-based characteristics is that each one
is designated by a particular spatial configuration: physical boundaries or borders.

Although each of the places also featured some basic overlapping and fluid social
boundaries depending on who was using it and the time of day/year, there were very
obvious signals as to when one was entering into and leaving the space. For example,
when you step onto the track, lines guide movement and dictate that you manage the
motion of your body to stay in place following the linear path provided by each
individual lane. In the case of the classrooms it is as simple as a door frame which when
closed is a hard border that maintains exclusion. With the courts, it is rather a change in
surface from carpet to synthetic plastic or wood that signifies the difference in activity;
this floor shift is augmented by partial barriers in the form of walls of glass which, while
allowing spectatorship, limit access. Another physical “boundary” that must be crossed in
order to use the aforementioned places and participate in these activities is the necessary
equipment. Sometimes this is as simple as getting a basketball or racquet from the
equipment staff, other times it is in the form of a student ID which is used to ensure your
right to participate and then in the case of the track there is a need for an able body.
While the track has elevator access and I saw on occasion a few disabled or differently
abled people attempting to use the track, it is essentially a microcosm of all gymnasium
in general and of the Rec specifically. They have the appearance of open access to all, but in actuality, even when physical barriers like walls, doors, equipment and ID cards are seemingly non-existent or unnecessary, social barriers emerge as the strongest force in the practice of exclusion. No space demonstrates this more than the main fitness area in the lower level of the Rec.

**Troubling Fitness and Re-creating Bodies through Discipline**

While I have referred previously to the concept of disciplinary power in a general sense, I want to explore this issue more in the context of “the weight room” and “the cardio machines”. What differentiates these places from the rest of the Rec is that each place and each piece of equipment in it signifies simplicity and accessibility of use. That is, removed from social relations, the treadmill, the elliptical, the recumbent bicycle, the weight machines and the free weights suggest if you want to use them to recreate your body, you can. In some cases this is true, bodies in wheelchairs can lift free weights, larger bodies can run on treadmills and most “normal” bodies can perform in whatever ways their body is able. The peculiar question, then, arises: why do certain types of bodies perform certain types of activities over others? With few to no physical barriers in place, there must be a different force at work that functions to create exclusionary spatial practices.

One of the fundamental shifts in this thesis then and in my own attempts at extending sports geographic theory through John Bale’s work is that his invocation of critical humanism begins to lose some resonance or is at least challenged by the problem of disciplinary power. If people really do have the agency to live, perform and make
places as they see fit, even in concert with other people and amidst structures that oppress them, why then in observing their behavior, do their performances seem as such automatic responses or rehearsed performances? Many forms of critical humanism which focus on individual agency and freedom tend to exaggerate our own ability to recognize the types of discourses and knowledges that shape our being – one of which is patriarchy’s role in maintaining the gender order. This is why I have suggested that post-structural feminists working from a specifically Foucauldian perspective have created an effective critique.

Contrary to the critical humanist notion of place-making as a practice that takes a built space or natural space and simply transforms it into a ‘peopled space’ through repetitive use, discursive space is one which is developed through the constant negotiation of power relations. Within the framework of a ‘post Bale-ian’ sports geography:

“Reversing the customary assumption that place is a structured space, space can be conceived of as an outcome, the product of an activity, which has a temporal dimension. Place, then is constituted by sets of relations which cut across spatial scales. In other words, places touch the ground as spatially located patterns and forms of behaviour and are defined, maintained and altered through the impact of unequal power relations. From this perspective, different sporting places can be distinguished from each other through the operation of the relations of power that construct boundaries around them, creating spaces with certain meanings in which some relationships are facilitated, others discouraged. […][I]ndividual sporting places or buildings cannot be explained by simply looking within them, but must be viewed as open and porous.

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8 I have designated sports geographies written from a perspective that both address Bale as a foundational piece and have augmented them with so-called ‘post’ philosophies or from radical feminism as ‘post Bale-ian’ in order to differentiate their works and to situate my own work as one such piece.
networks of social relations subject to a variety of influences within the context of time” (Vertinsky 2004a: 9).

Up to this point during my observations, it was enough for my analysis to explain how people used the various sports places in the Rec by seeing the obvious markers that demonstrated why people were performing in the manner they were. Visualizing people moving through space and from place to place between one activity and another seemed to make perfect sense because most of the Rec functioned with a significant amount of fluidity. The structure of various spaces and the types of embodied identities associated with them seemed self-obvious; athletes populated the courts but other types of people could use them too, anyone with the interest could sign up for a class if they had the time and money, and depending on how crowded the track or circuit room were, it was generally accessible. The issue of fitting into or out of place was at best a functional guideline but it didn’t exactly seem as strict as I expected. Certainly this does not mean the absence of power relations – as I expressed them in my own use of the track and noted them in other places – but what it did show to me was that my primary research question might be flawed. That is, my supposition that the entire Rec was made up of a strict nexus of boundaries proved more open to transgression than I previously thought. However, when I finally started analyzing the main fitness area comprised of “the weight room”, “weight machines” and “primary cardio equipment”, I noticed a tensing up of the negotiation of social and spatial identities.

Beyond the sort of basic speculation that was obvious of the other sporting places, these spaces/bodies/performances functioned without good explanation in almost strict exclusion to one another. Men with larger bodies (both toned, muscled bodies and
heavier ones) populated the weight room engaging in serious achievement oriented maintenance of their already shaped bodies – while not specifically engaged in sport they were not ‘merely re-creating’ either. Despite being open on two sides, the performance oriented nature of the room took on invisible boundaries that functioned more from sensory perception than physical barriers; the sight of bulging bodies crowded together in front of mirrors, the smell of sweat and body odor permeating the small enclosed space, and the sound of weights clanking and grunting created an atmosphere of masculine intensity. Next to the weight room, weight machines spilled out bridging the performance based nature of weight lifting with the accessibility of the cardio machines. As part of this, there was also a bridging of identities and bodies. More often than not, this area functioned as a zone of ambiguity as less than hyper-masculine men would gather to use the weight machines while also intermingling with the women who would use the equipment in addition to performing cardio. In general though, the area appeared to lack the intensity of the weight room or the re-creative nature of the cardio machines.

At the other end of the spectrum, the cardio equipment area was more mechanical and sterile. Each machine was lined up in a matrix so as to maximize efficiency of space, and strict time limits on each machine helped to maintain the flow of traffic. Young women almost exclusively occupied this area of the gym especially congregating on the elliptical machines and the bicycles. Although there was some mixing on the treadmills between young men’s whose bodies were muscled, they tended to be smaller in size than the ‘pure’ weightlifters. However, this is when duration demonstrated another difference in gendered re-creation. The men who would use the cardio equipment would do so
cassually as either a warm-up or a cool-down while the women would use the machines as long as allowed because their goals appeared to be re-creating the body; in other words, ridding it of the impurities of fat/calories/weight I previously mentioned so as to fit in-place in the wider set of social relations. Although there were women who would talk while using the equipment, “proving” that the cardio equipment was less than a serious space, what struck me is that rather than the common sense assumption in the ‘trialectic of sport’ that performance and sport are more standardized and serious was actually the areas deemed more playful or re-creative were the most intense.

In my time at the Rec, it seemed as though once an individual was comfortable enough or disciplined enough to enter into the weight room then they could be more playful at their practice of lifting weights. In fact, there was much more camaraderie and talk amongst weightlifters who generally lifted in pairs or small groups. However, if someone got out of line by taking too long or working out improperly, the groups would self-policing and maintain the discipline of the space. Not only that the weightlifting men because of the nature of the activity were capable of taking breaks, disengaging their bodies from the weights and allowing for discontinuity in their fitness.

On the other hand, the cardio equipment by its very nature created the mechanical relationship of the re-creationist which was then often augmented by listening to iPods or watching the TV overhead. This melding of technology and the body creates new social and spatial relationships that make the body work in certain ways. Specifically the cardio equipment functions as new geographies of fitness “woven from the shifting landscapes of risk, scientific knowledge and flexibility. These geographies link governmental
practices that occur in a wide range of spaces [...] practices that involve the working
together of human bodies and machines” (McCormack 1999: 164-5). While I would often
see the weightlifting men joking around with one another or casually talking between
sets, the women using the cardio machines appeared trapped in endless motion set to the
pace of the machine while focusing their attention on getting through the workout,
making oneself pure by achieving weight loss and re-creating the body which is a never
ending process. The hybrid nature of their workouts while empowering them with the
technology to remake their bodies and their fitness-in-place is carefully regulated in such
a way as to limit the possibility of transgression. In this way, the women using the cardio
equipment – because of the layout of the machines, because of the power of wider social
relations that create sports places, and because of the way they re-created their bodies to
fit into place – demonstrate the pervasive way the disciplining of bodies occurs
throughout the Rec. While men with the appropriate bodies could (if willing to transgress
the masculine boundaries) use all areas of the lower levels, women seemed tied in a
negative sense to their hybrid-bodies tied to the cardio machines.

How is it that the concept of discipline relates to this? Discipline functions as a
way of making bodies legible in a particular way thereby making it useful for certain
subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the
body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms
of obedience).” In other words, it makes the body more capable through practice and
repetition while ensuring it lacks the ability to transgress. Beyond simply structuring the
utility of the individual body, it distributes these ‘docile’ bodies so as to maximize their value through enclosure. Foucault continues, “It does this first of all on the principle of elementary location or *partitioning*. Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual” (143, original emphasis). It takes the fear of punishment and internalizes it so that we not only fear the gaze of others, we gaze inwardly to make sure we are not out-of-place.

In terms of the Rec, women (and less masculine men) by basis of the legibility of their bodies are excluded by the enclosure of the weight room, and then their bodies are enclosed again at the personal level by the type of re-creative activities allowed to them. No place in the Rec demonstrates this more than the cardio machines which function spatially and socially to partition the people, keep them enclosed, organized and in motion – to keep their bodies useful while enthralled to the technology re-creating them. While other sports places certainly suffer from the diffusion of disciplinary power in different manifestations and their own types of enclosures, it is less pervasive and nefarious because it is not as inherently tied to gender or to the maintenance of certain kinds of bodies – specifically the impure, unfit form.

Feminist scholars have shown that this type of designed segregation is not accidental or natural but rather a deliberate attempt to maintain this disciplinary power. According to Vertinsky (2004a: 12) this is because “The enclosures of sporting spaces served to reinforce hierarchical boundaries between who was to count as an athlete […] and to perpetuate the exclusion of women which constructed women’s bodies as certain kinds of entities with certain properties, spatial capabilities and proper places.” As with
much of modernity since the industrial revolutions, rational thought has coupled with the emergence of ever progressing science and technologies. The disciplining of bodies emerged first as an extension of a punitive and juridical society in order to ensure the conditioning of society – its fundamental spatial configuration was the prison. As Vertinsky (2004b: 3) explains, unlike the long history of outdoor play, “indoor gymnasium by contrast [were] structurally related to and arose simultaneously with the prison, the asylum and the schoolhouse in the context of the spatial disciplining and functionalization of social life.” Included in the emergence of this ‘spatial disciplining’ then was the development of physical education, the coupling of school with physical activity and ultimately the creation of college gymnasia.

It is logical then within this discussion of discipline, as a function of larger social relations and as specifically expressed in the case of the Rec, that I revisit the maps I have made and explain the fourth feature I have ascribed which are the monitoring stations designated by the blue circles and the uncountable number of cameras that function to make parts of the Rec a miniature ‘panopticon’. Foucault (1995) invokes the discussion of the panopticon, a prison built so that the prisoners would believe they were always being monitored by a central authority, to explain the way discipline develops from the tenets of observational techniques to extend its power over all space. In modern times, the giant black camera globes that monitor different parts of commercial areas including places like gymnasia function to disperse this effect even further so that as individuals we know we are being monitored without ever knowing where the authorities monitor us from. This effect in the Rec is coupled by an actual central monitoring station that can
virtually see into all areas except for the weight room which as discussed previously has been enclosed in order to mark itself as its own area of disciplined performance. However, the place most visibly and functionally monitored is once again the cardio machines from cameras overhead, from the entry and upper levels, as well as from a station on the lower level. More significantly and confirming the disciplinary nature of the Rec is that this station is continuously staffed to regulate flow on the cardio equipment.

As Foucault (1995: 170) expresses, disciplining functions to ‘train’ and to ‘make’ individuals through its techniques of observation. These techniques include not only consistent monitoring, but also use of time-tables in order to assure bodies are kept as productive as possible. In the case of using cardio equipment, it is about facilitating the greatest number of bodies able to be re-created over a set period of time so that it must come back day after day in order to continue this re-creation. He explains that “Exercise, having become an element in the political technology of the body and of duration, does not culminate in a beyond, but tends towards a subjection that has never reached its limit” (162). This conceptualization of exercise in a disciplinary society certainly pertains to all areas of the Rec and to fitness writ large, but as my earlier observations noted, the cardio machines in effect present a rupture that isn’t visible in the training of bodies elsewhere. The stark contrast of the way people are controlled and bodies dominated in their use of the cardio equipment makes visible the pervasive nature of discipline in physical recreation. And the function of cardio equipment as previously discussed is to help make the body ready for other types of activities (such as lifting weights or playing sports) or
for being beautiful which effects the men and women who use cardio equipment very differently. This is because as Markula and Pringle (2006: 87) note, “disciplinary effect is strengthened through the media presentation of the perfect body” which has until at least very recently fetishized the ‘aerobicizing’ female body over all others (Markula 1995). In this regard:

“patriarchal domination over women is based on the assumption that men are naturally—biologically—stronger and bigger than women. […] To retain this power arrangement in patriarchal society, it is necessary, thus, to define the female body differently from the male body: ideally, the weak female’s muscles are sleek and firm […] The aerobics fit body fits in this scheme nicely, whereas the body-building body challenges this gender dichotomy” (441).

The discourses that work through the media and through social interaction function to discipline our mental knowledge so that we consistently work to discipline our body knowledge. No matter how empowering the actual fitness technology and re-creation spaces of the Rec are in their appearance as openly accessible, wider social relations of imagined fit bodies limit this resistance. Combined with the actual architectural design that facilitates the panoptic effect, the diffusion of disciplinary power that pushes individuals to continuously remake their bodies because of their own disgust for themselves demonstrates that “while these [hybrid] geographies muddy the clarity of the boundaries between ontological categories such as male/female, […] at the same time they work as forces of purification, subtly and no so subtly reinforcing these very same dualisms” (McCormack 1999: 156). It is also why the people who use these fitness (rather than sport) areas of the Rec (i.e. women who are too big and men who are too small) are judged so harshly by society and by other Rec members – something I will discuss more fully among other subjects in analysis of my interview data.
Interrogating Differences of Opinion: Interview Responses and Motivations

In their analysis of the fitness center from Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of symbolic capital, Frew and McGillvray (2005: 163) comment there is a common assumption that “the health and fitness club represents a contested sub-cultural field (of sport and recreation) where the possession of physical capital is traded for distinction”. Like them, I developed this project working from this assumption; however, they conclude that casual (or less serious) “Consumers may be attracted by the physical capital that the sub-cultural field of health and fitness offers but, betrayed by the indulgent lifestyles of their carnivalesque bodies, they have not fully internalized the rules of the game” (171). This leads them to believe that for most users, a fit body and therefore fitness-in-place is an ‘abstract hope’. If people recognize that they will never attain the type of body they desire or told to desire by media discourses, then why do people work out? And what does this say about the function or accessibility of the Rec? As I concluded above, Frew and McGillvray likewise state that actual experience demonstrates “a challenge to the status of the health and fitness club as a neutral space where (re)creative experiences are consumed openly and freely” (173).

Having established through my observations that the Rec, like other gymnasias, emerges as a place of discipline, I want to show how my interview participants both reaffirm and contest my ‘geography of fitness’. While other scholars have investigated subcultures of fitness, they have primarily focused on breaking down and analyzing some obvious stereotypes. Much of this focus has been on deconstructing bodybuilding and the links between sexuality and transgression (Johnston 1998; Klein 1993, 1990; Wesely
2001). As described above, these authors and others have elaborated on the ways fitness operates in the ‘physics of power’ (Foucault 1995) created by a disciplinary society (Markula 1995; McCormack 1999; Spielvogel 2002). While these works have been foundational in my understanding the design and use of gymnasia, they lacked resonance with the everyday geographies of fitness I was witnessing. It is one thing to observe and conclude that the Rec functions as a site of discipline, but it is another to talk with casual users to understand the way outsiders see these subcultures and whether they feel confined by the disciplinary power networked throughout the Rec.

The primary question then, among others, I hope to answer in the analysis of my interviews is what other motives might be at play in working out beyond the desire for self-discipline or a body that fits in-place. As I will demonstrate these other expressed motives, or desires, often reinforce or support the extension of disciplinary power. Crossley (2006) notes that among other motivations besides disciplinary discourse are roughly: the loss of a fitter self, recovery from an injury or desire to return to previous athletic ability; ‘enjoyment’, having fun and playing; ‘social interaction’ and community; ‘relaxation’ and stress reduction; achievement or pleasure at exhausting the body; physical appearance and otherwise health-related goals; and finally, continual training for a sport. To sum up, Crossley notes that while many people do join gyms because of bad ‘feelings’ about their bodies, “it is not a necessary cause in that respect that people can join gyms without being or thinking that they are overweight” (46). While I do agree with Crossley that these motivations are the ones identified by my own participants, I do not want to dismiss, as he does, that there is no underlying structure or discursive
construction shading my respondents answers. I believe Crossley like many others over-estimates the way that playfulness can be as constructed as achievement oriented performance. In this case and in my discussion of my participants’ motives, the freedom of play was often described or substituted as their desires for more goal-oriented play. In other words, the effects of discipline while not always as visible in casual re-creation seeped into my respondents’ answers even about playing games. However, with that said, Crossley’s ‘gym motives’ combined with the discussion of discipline are the general framework for my narrative analysis.

Interlude: Thoughts on Method and Form of Analysis

In chapter four, I detailed how I chose my methodology and the unfortunate ways that my project had to be redesigned in order to accommodate the type of data that my fieldwork ultimately produced. What at first appearance was a weakness, after several readings of the interviews, I realized that six in-depth interviews provided more information than I had initially sought. Another study about gym-goers (specifically bodybuilders) was performed by Wesely (2001) who also surprisingly had an $n = 6$. Like her I asked primarily general and open-ended questions ranging on a wide variety of topics to help establish the interviewees’ backgrounds as well their current perceptions of the Rec and their own sports and recreation experiences. For these reasons, I have chosen to model this section following her methodology and analysis which begins with providing a description of the respondents, followed by the discussion of the five themes I identified.
While the questions were all asked in the same order to each participant, I have arranged their answers as they developed into a narrative rather than in a linear fashion because some respondents would suggest ideas that another person had mentioned in response to a very different question. Altogether, the responses totaled thirty pages of transcribed notes condensed from about twice as much ‘raw data’. As previously mentioned, all subjects were graduate students between the ages of 23-31 at the time of interview. All interviewees were self-identified as white, although race was not something I inquired about in the interview. All names are pseudonyms chosen by the individual. Rather than asking for specifics about body type or fitness level, I asked general questions about how they thought of their body or what types of activities they do and how consistently they do them. Without further ado, I present my interview subjects:

Interview Subject Profiles

Lois was a 31 yr old female who described herself as being “moderately physically active throughout” life in tennis, track and intramural sports. However, her injured back has kept her out of exercise more recently. About her activity schedule she says, “I get really into it for a month or two, and then I fall off the wagon for awhile. That’s my basic cycle.” Regarding this, she notes that when she does go regularly she goes 2-3x a week and participates in classes including spinning, water aerobics, and kickboxing as well as intramural sports like dodgeball, softball and volleyball. She does not think any part of her identity (e.g. gender, age) – outside of her fitness level – affects her participation at the Rec. Most of her activities are done with friends as she states “I
like socializing and spending time with my friends.” Speaking of her friends as a motive, she notes that “I became involved […] because my friends were doing it and asked me to come along. I wanted to work out more, so I thought it would be more fun with them than doing it” alone.

Buck was a 29 yr old male who recalled that “I used to be really active. In high-school I played a sport every semester. […] I still like to play sports whenever I can. You get some exercise, bond with friends, and release the natural competitiveness. As far as going to the gym to stay in shape etc., I’ve gone through a history of I give it a shot for about one month a year.” Sports obviously formed an important part of his continued interest in recreation but he noted “I’m not really good enough to play in a ‘real’ league nor do I even know how I would go about doing that. I stick with friends.” Continuing this discussion, he explained “I go to the Rec to play sports. I’ve tried to ‘work-out’ a few times but that’s not really my thing.” He also suggested that nothing really gets in the way of his use of the Rec, although he contradicted this during certain portions of his interview. Following this line of questioning, he implied he doesn’t feel compelled to play or perform based on what others are doing or think of him. He has a positive self image despite a low activity level, and interestingly enough, he critiques men who are fit: “I am not that active but I’m pretty good with my diet. I feel like I’m about average; until I go to Abercrombie. Who wears a small?”

Ruby was a 24 yr old female was quick to discuss that she saw herself as physically disabled by two leg disorders which caused her to be sensitive about her body
image. Because of this she stated she enjoys being around other people she knows instead of being alone. She recalled that she has never really had a chance to run and recounted how a pinch “‘runner’ would do all the running for [her] in PE classes”. She noted that at the time of the interview she was not very active. Recalling her own satisfaction with her body and her motivation to keep going she explained that “My commitment to a steady workout plan dwindled after the first full year as I became more satisfied with my body – the need to maintain that body somehow eluded me.” Following along with this, she said now she has “a somewhat chubby body type; I’m overweight by BMI standards”. Despite this she says when she goes regularly she exercises at the Rec 5x a week. She also participates in multiple classes and enjoys group activities. Regarding her identity and motivation from friends, she stated that “I often feel compelled to participate in intramurals because my friends and partner are participating in them. […] I would say I don’t feel pressured to do something they’re doing, but I do feel like I shouldn’t be doing something because no one like me is doing it.”

Roxanne was a 27 yr old female who described herself as a multiple sport athlete in youth ranging from softball and soccer in high school to skiing among other sports in college. According to her, she participates at least every week focusing mostly on team sports. Like other respondents, she notes that she plays mostly with other graduate students because “They are interested in similar things, have passes to the Rec Center and we can even ride with each other to games and matches.” Despite saying that she is either low to moderately active, she used humor to dismiss the question about her body type suggesting that she is “Voluptuous!” Also like other respondents, she responded that she
will go quite often and then not go for equally long periods. She is also very conscious of
her body, noting that health is very important because “it determines what I can and
cannot do. I have slowed down considerably since my 2 ACL reconstructions. […] The
pain varies from sport to sport.” Finally, regarding her identity, she states that “Because
of my various roles on campus I know many people at KSU. I do not like to be a sweaty
pig in front of people that I work with, for, and who work for me…or students of mine.”

Karl was a 29 yr old male and a multisport athlete throughout his entire life and
he continues to participate in a wide range of sports both organized for competition, for
intramurals and for general recreation. He said that he also engages in regular fitness
activities though mostly non-impact activities including “walking, stationary bike, circuit
training”. While he does participate in community leagues at the Rec, he prefers activities
which he is playing with friends and colleagues. When asked about he his body type and
activity level, he responded that he is “Short and overweight. Even though I participate in
a lot of activities, there are also times where I am very sedentary.” In response to a
question about what discursively attractive bodies look like, he made a more personal
statement explaining that his background in sports made him more interested in people
who also played sports rather than those who worked out. Finally, like Roxanne, he was
aware of how he could be seen on campus and explained “Whether it is sports or just
working out I try not to draw too much attention to myself because of positions I have on
campus.”

Jill was a 23 yr old female who said that while she has been active throughout her
life, she felt like she could never be considered athletic. In fact, she also stated that
despite not using a gym until college for the first time, she continues to be active 3-4x a week. Like all the other respondents, she preferred to participate with family and friends. Reinforcing her desire to distance herself from an athlete she described herself as “average. Short and average. I’m not athletic, but active.” With regards to her self-identifying as active but not athletic, she felt that people like her (i.e. bookish girls) don’t normally exercise. She, too, explained that her perception of her body, health and level of participation is cyclical and felt that winter months were more important than the summer.

General Characteristics and Major Themes

Most notably, what all participants had in common was an aversion to serious athletics or to being judged on performance. All six talked about how important friends were to their time at the Rec but also regarding physical activity in general, and each mentioned that while they liked playing some sports or being active, it was about having fun most of all. The two males seemed to be more interested in groups sports while the female participants mentioned attending classes more regularly, and outside of a few minor discussions of professional conflicts, no one felt excluded from participating in any activity at the Rec. Finally, one item of further note is that all of the interview subjects had a rather candid response about their body types that I wasn’t expecting – while I intended for people to say things like ‘larger’ or ‘smaller’ or ‘big’ or ‘slim’, people actually shared some of their own doubts about their bodies. This is an important feature
of the responses because as we will see this shows how internalized the issue of fitness is even in individuals who state that it is not necessarily important.

Based on these character profiles and the cross-textual discourses created from the answers to different questions, I will primarily be discussing five loosely categorized themes starting with: 1) the dichotomy between Sports and Exercise as well as Fun and Work that reflects the Bale-ian distinction between Performance and Play but in a unique way; 2) the importance of Competition and Teamwork in the role of transgressive activities and Play and Performance as a matter of personal achievement; 3) discursive recounting of Repulsive Bodies and Healthy Bodies; 4) Resisting Exclusion and Getting Fit and, finally ending with, 5) personal Health and Appearance as motivations for exercise.

**Sports and Exercise, Fun and Work: Turning the Trialectic Inside Out**

In previous chapters, I have discussed how in Bale-ian sports geography performance and achievement were all linked together as highly masculinized, disciplines spaces of sport. During my time observing the Rec, this was something I concluded to be true only when the sports spaces (i.e. the courts) were made into places by dominant male-sports culture while other times it seemed more ubiquitous. From this I observed, that exercise areas might actually be the most demonstrative of the pressure of performance and achievement while the sports areas might actually be more close to the spirit of play – a sentiment echoed from the very beginning during the interviews:

“I think sports are lots of fun, but exercise for the sake of exercising takes a lot more dedication.” (Lois)
“Physical activity is very important, especially for sport and recreation. It helps work off massive amounts of adult beverages and serves as a stress reliever. I should have more of an interest in activity for exercise or fitness sake, but sports make it much easier to get motivated for activity than just working out.” (Karl)

“Hey, some people are into it and I understand why. I just don’t get the point to running? You go nowhere. I mean what’s the point of a workout? You only do it so you can get through the workout.” (Buck)

More to the point, while recalling that the obvious purpose of the Rec is for physical activity, Jill explains there is a geographical division between serious and fun places:

“More serious activity definitely takes place in a gym or the Rec. This is because the place is designed for the sole purpose of ‘doing’ physical activities. You have machines made to burn calories in rows and lines. It’s all very mechanical, very methodical. The machines even tell you how many calories you have burned. This just adds to the seriousness.” (Jill)

Fun, on the other hand, occurs:

“anywhere but the weights/cardio areas. These areas just seem designed for strict work outs and are not really ‘fun’ unless you have fun running on an elliptical.” (Jill)

And on:

“The many courts in the Rec. […] There are a lot of community and intramural sports offered. I really like the team sports because you can play with your friends. I also enjoyed the community racquetball league because I learned a lot about the game and got to meet a lot of really nice new people.” (Lois)

Upon first reading through these responses, I was surprised at the stark difference between each participant’s perception of sports and exercise. While I expected that people would find sports easier than ‘exercise for exercise’s sake’, I assumed it would have been more a function of disinterest rather than out right aversion. However, the distinction also served for some of the participants as a reminder that ‘play’ and ‘fun’
were not always enough of a motivation – a characteristic expressed more thoughtfully by the males:

“Some people shy away from [performance]. They can just run and not worry about a score or time. It serves as a stress reliever for them. For me, I need at least some type of seriousness, if it’s a score or time or distance. I feel like that keeps me motivated.” (Karl)

Buck, who previously stated that he didn’t see a purpose to working out, and strongly mentioned his aversion to running noted that even when sports are about having fun, there needs to be a purpose:

“I do enjoy playing sports; there is an end-goal…to win. I can even understand practicing for a sporting event. I just really don’t get physical activity for physical activity sake. Sure, we would all love to lose a few pounds, I just personally don’t see the rewards (looking better) outweighing the costs.” (Buck)

Thinking back to the profiles and the male predilection for sports, it was interesting to note here that male respondents identified seriousness with playing sports for achievement. The female respondents, on the other hand, expressed that the more serious aspects of their physical activity were actually dedicating their bodies to fitness:

“When I work out for fitness, I take it seriously. I also try hard when I play competitive sports, but I’m really there for the fun and the competition when I play sports rather than fitness.” (Lois)

“If I make the effort to go to the gym or to ‘work-out’ […] then I would categorize it as a exercise-fitness. Probably just because it seems like I’m going out of my way to participate in a physical activity. If I physically go to the gym, I take them more seriously than I would otherwise. I think it has something to do with me actually making to go there for the purpose of working out. Other activities are done for fun and so, while I am exercising, that’s not why I do them. I take the other activities seriously, but not from a fitness standpoint.” (Jill)

“When I’m working out ‘seriously’ it is for fitness and health – more because I want to lose weight or feel better about myself; when I participate in intramural sports or take walks and the like, that is more for basic recreation – more ‘for
fun’. I take my actual workouts seriously, when I actually do them. You put into
what you get out – so if I half-ass my workout, how will that benefit me?” (Ruby)

However, while it would be simple to say sports are for fun and exercise is serious, all of
the respondents are quick to point out that there is an issue of taking that seriousness too
far:

“Some people can overdo it for sure, but most people have a good attitude toward
physical activity. I think that people that are trying to build a lot of muscle or who
are trying to lose weight are most serious about the Rec.” (Lois)

“I feel like most of the time the people who are most serious about physical
activity are the people who already conform to the social idea of being ‘in shape’.
They are the girls who are super skinny and good looking and the guys who
already have a built muscular body. It’s like they think they are trying to maintain
their good looks […] Maybe these people look how they do because they take
physical activity too seriously, but in my opinion, it’s just not worth it.” (Jill)

“Some [take it too seriously], seems like a few of the weight lifters and treadmill
runners take it to an extreme.” (Roxanne)

The emergence of this association of seriousness with fitness re-creation seems to support
what I and others have argued previously about the disciplinary nature of the Rec. For my
interview subjects who were primarily casual to moderate users of the Rec, their activities
primarily focused on sports and play. Because of this, their perceptions of the Rec and of
fitness-oriented people are colored by a dark criticism of having taken their bodies too
far. This begs the question as to whether the casual users are more aware of the
disciplinary mechanisms of the Rec and chose to avoid them for other motivations
(Crossley 2006) or as Frew and McGillvray (2005) explained, my interview subjects saw
the fit body as an ‘abstract hope’ and thus chose to dismiss it because of its difficulty to
obtain.
From my perspective as a both a once fat, once fit person, I tend to think it is a measure of both. People are motivated by having fun but only to an extent, and but the fear of failure is often the reason people will refrain from trying their hardest because no one wants to try and fail. One of the possibilities of motivation that lies between fun sport and hard exercise is the role of teamwork and the intensity of competition.

**Competitive Co-op: Having Fun and Working Hard to Fit In, Staying Fit to Win**

The motivation for avoiding the seriousness of performance and fitness might be unclear, but what is obvious is that people’s performance still matters as long as they’re having fun. I think this is something that rings true from my observations of all the people playing sports or exercising casually at the Rec. On the one hand, there are people who simply do not look happy to be there and are struggling through their workouts as others have commented; on the other hand, there are people having a good time (usually while on the courts) who also seem to be trying just as hard as those people working out. In my interviews there seemed be a general sentiment that sports were more fun than exercise, but you still had to work hard to make them competitive or because they already were. In this regard, competition and teamwork seemed to go hand in hand:

“I prefer competitive activities most because I really enjoy competition. I also like team sports for the competition and the camaraderie.” (Lois)

“For me, the fun and games with others is the way to go. More self-determined people may be just fine by themselves but I prefer the group approach. Sure intramurals motivates me to get involved with my friends, even if I don’t particularly love that game. […] I have fun and take it seriously.” (Roxanne)
However, the issue of competition is a tricky one as it is located in the judgmental gaze of disciplinary power as it reflects both inwards on one’s own performance and one’s perception of others’ performances. Thus, while people speak to wanting to be around teammates and just have fun, they often give away the importance of maintaining performance:

“Depends on your goals of why you are there and what you want to get out of your experience. Running and individual swimming seems very serious because people are often alone and have to meet their own goals and time restraints. Much harder to get motivated by yourself...if it is a team, then you will feel like you are letting the group down if you do not show up.” (Roxanne)

“I take intramurals seriously to a degree, but it’s more for fun and the chance to be a part of a ‘team’. I know that I’ll never be amazing at any actual sport, so I can’t take myself too seriously – I have no real experience with organized sports. But, at the same time, because of that lack of experience, it’s really nice to be on a team which motivates me to do well.” (Ruby)

Part of this distinction of competition is results – something that again both challenges and reinforces the static nature of the ‘trialectic’ in which results are usually lined up with achievement oriented sports rather than experiential play. Ultimately, the overlapping desire to have fun and to perform well (i.e. win) means that the categories of sport/performance and recreation/play are not as discrete as they seem:

“There should be some middle ground. If you don’t have fun I don’t see how you could stay with an activity. I don’t think competitiveness can keep someone interested for life. Fun is key but it’s also good to be able to say, I won, I did well, or I will win next time or do better.” (Karl)

“I like to win when we play, but playing the game is fun too. When I don’t perform well, it doesn’t make me happy. [...] Being the fastest, strongest, or skinniest isn’t really important to me.” (Lois)

“Having fun matters most. Like most people, I have more fun when I win so I strive for that. [...] Just getting out of the house and being with friends is enjoyment enough.” (Buck)
One of the interesting facets of this discussion with each respondent is the way that they seem to be reassuring themselves that it’s okay to want to win, but they have to make sure to go back to the message of fair play and having fun so that they distance their bodies from the discipline inherent in achievement oriented fitness. In my interpretation, this does not mean that competition and teamwork substitute for discipline or even offer resistance to discipline, but rather it presents a kinder, gentler urge to perform well as an individual while wrapping it in a discourse of collectivity. Something that becomes apparent when individual results are compared across group:

“Even in recreational games you measure yourself against other players. If you are playing against great players it may be an accomplishment to just keep up with them, if you are playing against less skilled players it should matter if you score or pass well. There are certain accomplishments that matter for each activity, and those change depending on the activity and who you are with.” (Karl)

“I really enjoy playing with friends who are good. When the level of competition increases, your own level increases. You don’t get better playing against others not as good as you. I always want to improve my game so I like playing with others slightly better than me. However, I don’t enjoy going out and getting my ass kicked either.” (Buck; my emphasis)

While for my two male respondents, their assessment of performance is based on the skill and the ability to keep up with the other team or teammates. In other words, their performance is based on an a standard projected outside of their own bodies, something to which they can strive to achieve. However, Ruby and Roxanne, have a different perspective which reflects back to what Lois said about interpreting one’s performance through the self-image of the body. That is, they look inwards and internalize their desire
to be equal to others by being around people similar to them so that their performance is adequate:

“In intramural sports, I feel like I’m letting down others if I fail to perform perfectly […] I also feel really bad internally for not having a good skill level. So maybe my performance matters more than I thought.” (Ruby)

“On the court or field with my friends playing team sports. It is better to go to the Rec with someone else…especially someone who is at a similar level of fitness/athletic prowess as you.” (Roxanne)

Despite trying to distance sports recreation from the seriousness, achievement-oriented behavior associated with other fitness and exercise activities, most of my respondents tend to be circular in their thoughts about performance. That is to say, they want to imagine an even playing field where people are socializing, having fun and just being active, but the power of discipline is the way that it seeps into and embeds itself into all ways of life. In the case of the casual users at the Rec, this tends to manifest itself as a distancing of achievement and the difficulty of fitness on one hand, and a recouping of performance in their ability to compete on the other. This distancing effect (i.e. exclusionary practice) is strategically deployed by my respondents, as we will see next, by pointing out the people they feel are too competitive or too fit and therefore the ones who make the gym and uncomfortable place.

**Repulsive Fit Bodies and Healthy Average Ones: Taking Re-creation Too Seriously**

Of all my time observing, I have recounted that the most disturbing trend I noticed in the sexual division of the Rec was the way that fitness was organized and the intensity to which it was performed and maintained. This is especially true in the way that
women seemed to be confined by an invisible force, tied to the machinations of cardio equipment, music players and televisions, and regulated time-tables. In general, the serious nature of these individuals’ workouts, their desire to fitness-in-place, and their attitude and appearance while working out all created a very public performance. Despite having been ‘one of those’ fit people during portions of my life, I often found the performative nature of the Rec itself intimidating. This was a feeling shared by one of my participants:

“I really don’t like doing physical activities by myself. I think at the gym, there are a lot of loners, but I just think it’s sort of weird. I end up staring at other people without meaning to or feeling awkward passing by all sorts of people who are too focused on their own business. It’s almost like being alone at the gym is like going to the bathroom or something. You do what you need to do and then leave. It’s weird.” (Jill)

Not only was it the social structure of the Rec, but the types of people who took it too seriously also posed a problem:

“People who are highly competitive or super fit. It just isn’t fun when you are getting blown out of the water when playing a sport or getting lapped a million times with someone extremely fit.” (Lois)

“People that are too into it. It’s just a game dude.” (Buck)

Recognizing this contradiction, however, was Karl who thoughtfully explained that his performance does matter and he can sympathize with how competitiveness can be off-putting:

“I guess people that take activities too seriously, but I understand because I have taken them too seriously at times too. I understand why. We are a hyper-competitive culture. The body building dudes take it seriously, the basketball players do too. I have sometimes fallen into the category of too serious.” (Karl)
Still, the general sentiment remained that others should not take fitness and re-creation so seriously, despite the lingering emphasis on self-discipline:

“I don’t think that it should [be taken seriously], unless you are a professional athlete where it is your job to perform a physical activity well […] Obviously, it is good to be physically active since it contributes to a healthy lifestyle, but the average person should only feel like they are performing or competing against themselves, if at all.” (Jill)

Although I understand as a former athlete and occasional fitness user the impulse to be intimidated by the hyper-fit, hyper-competitive culture of serious exercisers, I think I have also been blinded by those same experiences to the degree with which people judge different types of fit bodies. Thus during my interviews, I did expect people would blame the bodybuilders for creating discomfort, but I didn’t necessarily expect the ways in which people would critique them. When asked who the most off-putting performer was, participants almost unanimously responded:

“Meatheads on ‘roids. Can’t we build a separate gym for guys who own Affliction t-shirts?” (Buck)

“Big meatheads with an attitude problem that act like they own the gym… why… because I have just as much of a right to the gym as they do. They stink up the place and give weird looks.” (Roxanne)

“Maybe they would expect you to act like a meathead in the weight room” (Karl)

Not only was there a desire to distance themselves socially from the ‘meathead’ bodybuilder, but also to spatially relocate them as well. What is so odd about this assessment of bodybuilding, I think, is that in my observations the bodybuilders never left the weight room. How or why are these casual users or sports players so opposed to the existence of the weight room? It occurred to me that the answer seemed to lie in the contradictions of place I have discussed previously. The private nature of the weight
room, the enclosure policed by the community built simultaneously with the muscled bodies within it, opposed the discipline of the larger social networks intersecting at the Rec.

Another way of putting it is to say that, the casual users who perhaps feeling abnormal or out of power themselves sought to create a new normal (Foucault 2003; Ruddick 2006) by invoking disciplinary power for themselves – by redeploying it against the only people who seemed to be so confident in their performance that they were immune to the control by the gym. In fact, as I have explained in the spatial layout of the gym, it is possible to argue that the enclosure created by the bodybuilders in the weight room absent of other forms of social and spatial regulation existed as a commons that created a rupture in the disciplinary power of the Rec. And this is exactly the point about discipline in society – most “normal” bodies are different. In other words, the fat body or the lanky body, that is, the deviation is by and large the actual norm in society. Yet we know that discursive constructions of fit bodies are promoted as normal, but its re-creation remains an abstract hope. Thus the actual appearance of a common fit body stands out as fitting in too well. This is why I shouldn’t have been surprised by the disgust for the cardio-using-women at the Rec. What I didn’t expect, however, was that the people whom I initially intended to observe as excluded would be viewed as the cause of rather than a symptom of the pervasiveness of disciplinary power:

“In all honesty, people who are in really good shape and attractive – male or female – make me somewhat uncomfortable when I’m exercising. I try very hard to zone out while I exercise and not let that stuff bother me. But if I’m going to actually take myself seriously and get a good work-out then I’m going to sweat and breath heavily and generally ‘look bad’. People (i.e. girls) who come to the
rec center with makeup and coordinated outfits on make me feel like a fat pig and as if I’m being judged.” (Ruby)

“The people that go to the Rec DON’T need to go. And what’s with the chicks on the elliptical wearing make-up? Why would you do that?” (Buck)

“People who are overly athletic bother me. People who are too intense about stuff. Every once in awhile you are on the elliptical machine at the gym you get next to the girl who already has the ‘perfect’ body and who runs a mile a minute on the hardest level and just seems sort of crazy. Those people make me uncomfortable. I think it has to do with the fact that they seem so into themselves. I mean really, what’s so great about them? Can’t they just calm down for two seconds? I bet I’ll burn the same number of calories as you, just not as psychotically.” (Jill)

In this case of the mythical ‘elliptical girl with the make-up on’ we see how transgression can work in reverse. When conflicting norms come into contact with one another, it becomes evident of how discipline functions in complicity with partrharchy. In popular discourse then, at least as my interviewees express it, not only is female bodybuilding too transgressive (Johnston 1998; Wesely 2001) and therefore abnormal, but actually being too fit and attractive falls into this category as well. It begs the question, where should ‘fit’ women exercise if not in the weight room or on the machines? Should they attend only all-women ‘fit’ classes or gyms? As Spielvogel (2002: 200) explains, the critiquing of others is fundamentally a part of the re-creational process, but “Separate is never equal. When women are excluded or exclude themselves from building muscles, choosing instead to craft their bodies in more socially acceptable forms, the division of space can be seen as a form of control and intimidation.” This is, apparently, true even when women choose to work towards what they must think are socially acceptable bodies.
Speaking generally, if the bodybuilding ‘meathead’ and the ‘elliptical girl’ on appearance stand in as stereotypes of discursively fit and socially acceptable bodies which have been rejected by the casual users I interviewed, then what in their opinion are healthy bodies? The answer was ironic considering that despite judging the already fit people, the respondents seemed to imply that there was some truth to the social construction of health and attractive appearance. The healthiest bodies are:

“Average body types. These people seem to be able to moderate eating and working out (or have good genes).” (Lois)

“Average body types. If someone is excessively overweight they do not seem to be healthy. [...] On the other hand if someone is really skinny they do not seem to be healthy either.” (Jill)

Although average was ill-defined, it became clear that there were contradictions in how to define healthy bodies. When asked about how health and physical activity affected appearance, the most attractive bodies were judged this time in a mostly positive way primarily by the same criteria used to dismiss the ‘elliptical girl’:

“Societally – skinny women and muscle men. Swimming, running, and weight lifting. I would mostly associate these activities with people who are serious about physical activity and would therefore have a toned body type.” (Lois)

“I think society says that men should be super toned and muscular and women should be ultra skinny and tall. A socially attractive body does more gym-type activities in order to lose weight or gain muscle depending on gender. To fit into stereotypical ideas of attractiveness they have to do these activities as they are aiming to achieve a body type that does not naturally exist.” (Jill)

“For women, [...] thin and tan. [...] For men, the most attractive bodies are muscled. As far as the male body is concerned, weight lifting seems to be associated with an attractive body, as well as running. As far as the female body is concerned, [...] physical activity that doesn’t bulk but helps maintain a slender waist is probably the best.” (Ruby)
Again, I was left asking the same question, how does one re-create the body using the possibilities given by the sexual division of re-creation and disciplinary layout of the Rec? According to my respondents, the healthiest and most attractive bodies were re-created by the same activities deemed to be taken too seriously.

“Cardio. Muscle is fine but it is fleeting. Thin = healthy.” (Buck)

“A person can be thin and not that healthy looking […] And a person can be thick and healthy looking – toned muscles and not a great deal of fat. […] You have to find a happy medium – being too thin and too bulky doesn’t strike me as overly healthy.” (Ruby)

“Not overly thin or overly heavy. I don’t think it’s easy to judge healthiness on appearance.” (Karl)

“Not too overweight, carries self well, flexible, those moving around […] Those that walk with an air of confidence and competition.” (Roxanne)

The responses seem to support Frew and McGillvray’s (2005) explanation that feelings about one’s own body both reflect the desire for the fit body, but also its seeming impossibility to achieve. Most of my interviewees seemed to express as noted above that being healthy and attractive is about balance – about being average – rather than being too fit or too serious. Yet there was so much priority in these responses about being average or balanced but also about being active that I was left reflecting on the ways that people discussed competition and teamwork as well as differences between serious and fun.

This led me to the conclusion that casual users (perhaps a subculture of their own, perhaps not) distanced themselves from active subcultures in the fitness center like bodybuilding or cardio machines because the desire to be fit is so grotesque, it appears as a comical motive, one which must be replaced by a new normal – by motives to make
things fun but serious, competitive but cooperative, and overall balanced or average. In this way, transgression is reversed; it is subverted and diverted, the re-creative body is too discipline, the serious body is judged too fit and should be tempered to new, more normal socially acceptable forms. While I may be reading too into my interviewees’ responses, I think, their contradictory assessments of their own bodies and of others demonstrates the power that discipline plays in their mediation of what is socially acceptable for themselves and for others. Despite or maybe because of this, there remains a strong insistence on their ability to fitness-in-place and where they feel most comfortable working out.

**Resisting, Giving In, Getting Fit: Re-creating Bodies and Experiences of Exclusion**

During my discussion of the maps I created showing the spatial layout of the Rec, I gave some general observations about where I thought people normally congregated based on my perception of their gender, age and ability. More or less, my conclusion (based on personal experience and research) was that masculine men gathered in the weight room, feminine women used the cardio equipment and everyone else used the spaces in between – something confirmed in general by my respondents’ descriptions of the types of people in those places (i.e. the meathead and the girl on the elliptical). When directing the question to them in the opposite direction – where their preferred spaces were – the responses continued to reinforce the contradictory nature of the interviewees’ responses about types of bodies and where they fit in-place. In general there was some
trepidation about the use of the weight room, while some simply responded that they weren’t interested in those types of activities:

“I wouldn’t go to the free weight area, but that is partly because those types of exercises don’t interest me, and partly because it is usually packed.” (Karl)

“Yeah…I do not go into the weight area.” (Roxanne)

Others were more on point about where they spent most of their time. When Ruby and Jill were discussing the people who took exercise too seriously, they both mentioned the weight room and the cardio equipment. Although their opinion of the weight room remained consistent when discussing the places they stayed away from:

“I also don’t go in the free weights area on the bottom floor because I don’t know how to properly lift weights and I get the impression that only ‘serious’ weight lifters use that space. I used the drinking fountain in there once and even that made me feel uncomfortable. This tends to be an all male area.” (Ruby)

“Honestly, probably the free weights area. I feel like only athletic and “built” men belong there. […] It seems like a lot of the men there are there to try and impress girls and make themselves more muscular than they already are.” (Jill)

They both seemed not to realize the contradiction in their personal use of the cardio equipment. Hence, while they felt judged by (or were rather judgmental of) the hyper-feminine girls using the cardio machines, they still felt the most comfortable in this space because as I suggested the fit body that disgusted them was also the body they most wanted to re-create for themselves:

“I feel most comfortable on the elliptical machines. […] I watch one of the TVs and/or listen to my iPod to keep a rhythm or help the time pass. It’s also much easier to tone out everyone/thing else around me. […] Because I like to listen to my iPod, I’m not generally in a position to talk to anyone when on the elliptical.” (Ruby)
“I feel more comfortable on the cardio equipment, probably because it is what I use and have experience using. Plus there are TVs so you can just zone out and forget your surroundings.” (Jill)

What personally struck me about this was that the two youngest respondents Ruby, who was 24, and Jill, who was 23, seemed to most represent the exclusionary boundary of these two spaces. I don’t intend to make wild claims about this given it is only the experience of two people, but youth may play more of a role in the desire for a fit body.

Not only that, but when asked to clarify her position in a different question, Jill seemed not to perceive her gender or age as a problem with where she went, but rather a function of her lifestyle:

“If I am alone I can’t help looking at other people and then I just think about how they are probably looking at me […] If I am with others I would feel fine going anywhere in the Rec. Alone, walking through the middle of the free weights area would be weird. There are too many intense guys sitting around looking at their muscles. I mean if I was used to weight lifting I might feel more comfortable going into the free weights area. I have seen some girls in there. If I was an athlete, or weight lifter, or whatever, I would be fine going into the free weight area. Females can do that stuff, I just choose not to. I don’t think that it’s my gender that defines where I go or what I do, I think it’s more my lifestyle.” (Jill)

I contend that this simply reinforces what I have argued about discipline – it is so pervasive and individualized that we often are unaware of the larger structures and networks that function to bring our identity into play at certain times in particular places.

Without further clarification, it seems that lifestyle represents a catch-all for saying that it is unnatural for women to be there. This is especially true, I think, when looking at the way that Jill suggests it is something that has to be chosen in order to get fit to the level of intensity of the masculine nature of the space. At the very least, it suggests what Johnston (1998) and Wesely (2001) argued about the transgressive nature of female
weightlifters, although I am less optimistic. In general, it seems that most of the respondents agree that there is a sexual division of fitness in the spaces of the Rec. While the guys rather nonchalantly accept this as a given:

“Not really, you do see concurrency but that’s just how things work: skinny girls on the treadmill and beefcakes lifting. There is a gender difference. The elliptical and treadmills are for the ladies. If I feel like running I’ll go to the third floor. I feel everything else is kind of neutral.” (Buck)

“Most areas don’t have that issue, but it seems like the guys that work out the most congregate on the first floor and tiny girls hang out on the ellipticals on the 2nd floor.” (Karl)

The women seem to be a little more concerned and evocative in their descriptions:

“Big meatheads in the weight room. International students hanging by the ping pong tables, and skinny, overly tan white girls doing the circuit/stomach crunches.” (Roxanne)⁹

“The free weights area is certainly a place where muscled guys tend to fixate on themselves. […] Any time I have seen girls in the weight room, they’ve seemed to have some bulk too and are dressed similarly to the guys. I have never seen girls that come to the Rec with short shorts and make-up on in that area.” (Ruby)

The general consensus of my personal experiences, my observations and of the interview responses seems to reflect well on the maps I made during my fieldwork. The only place that really appears to be totally closed off is the weight room, the area that appears to be most open is the cardio equipment though it is mostly populated by women, and the rest of the Rec is open to everyone else; however, not everyone felt this way. There seemed to be a general distrust of a few of the areas I previously labeled ‘zones of ambiguity’ – this included the courts:

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⁹ I should add here, race was not something I had intentionally sought to inquire about – which may be considered a detriment to my work, but I didn’t feel that I could adequately express this and I think it something that could definitely be added to critical sports geography. However, what I want to point out right now is that this was the only time race was mentioned by any of my participants, although it seems obvious now that fitness is very much about whiteness.
“I feel like you have to be a man to play basketball. […] It also seems like the women are confined to the circuit area to work out/use weights, while the weight-lifting men dominate the weights on the lower floor. I don’t feel limited on the workout part because I wouldn’t want to work out with all those guys, but the basketball thing is limiting. You can’t even shoot hoops for fun when all the guys are playing team games on every court.” (Lois)

“I also would feel strange by myself on the basketball court because I’m pretty terrible at shooting hoops so I would look like a fool […] I think I worry about how active I am. I feel like a lot of the people who are there go on a much more routine basis than I do (like every day) so I wonder if I would really fit in. Maybe the rec center is just not my place.” (Jill)

While the basketball courts were, as I observed, an area that could be dominated by masculine subjects when it was heavily occupied, the second floor circuit room caused more mixed reactions:

“The second floor weights/cardio area has a set circuit you’re supposed to follow. I attempted to use the machines as I saw fit once when I was up there and a man kicked me off one because he was doing the actual circuit and I was not. I haven’t attempted to use those machines since.” (Ruby)

“Last year I went more often to do the circuit training but the new set up of the circuit is less user-friendly so I usually stick to the track and bike. I felt that the circuit was a very feminine (as opposed to masculine) area in the Rec, which I found odd because most things I read said that was one of the best workouts you could do. I think most men thought it was more manly to use the free weights than the machines.” (Karl)

Combining the experiences of my respondents and my own observations was helpful in clarifying whether people who attended the Rec actually suffered from practices of exclusion. As their responses suggest, many times this is incidental (e.g. not feeling comfortable around the weight room) and other times it is intentional (e.g. open aggression as in the case of Ruby in the circuit room).

However, I continue to remain firm in my perception of the Rec holistically a place where disciplinary power emanates in the practice of re-creation. I say this because
what each of these experiences highlights for me is the way that place-making and body-making (i.e. re-creating) come together to reinforce stereotypes about who belongs where. This tends to also be reinforced in the ways that my interview respondents – as victims of exclusion – participate in the maintenance of other exclusionary practices, the least of which is the way they talk about the stereotypical men and women of the Rec. While in previous responses, these bodies were regarded with disgust, when asked specifically about the types of people who looked serious, healthy and fit, respondents tended to be reverent in their attitude towards re-creating bodies – something which transcended gender boundaries:

“Fit people (regardless of gender) look more serious. It appears that they are dedicated and put in serious time. They must know what they are doing.” (Buck)

“When I picture someone with a ‘serious attitude’ toward physical activity I just picture someone who appears focused on what they’re doing, body type aside. A person could have any body type or image and still be serious about physical activity. Despite gender.” (Ruby)

“First there are the athletic, fit, in-shape type people. They are people who are just generally fit and have toned muscles, lean body shape, that sort of thing. [...] They are the type that looks like they popped out of a women’s/men’s health magazine.” (Jill)

“People with toned muscles or an athletic build. I would say they would be skinny, but I think you can have a serious attitude toward physical activity and not be super thin. I don’t think this varies across gender.” (Lois)

“More muscles = + for men […] More svelte = + for women.” (Roxanne)

At last, I thought, gender can be transgressed – even if only in an outwardly superficial way – by its ability to achieve a certain prescribed body type that isn’t too serious, but reflects the ideas of fun, health, cooperation and hard work that had previously been discussed. This, however, proved not to be the case, because when asked to clarify based
on gender, women (not men) were regarded with a different standard that reflected the disciplined body of the cardio-using-women previously discussed:

“Then there is the other type of people who are overly serious about physical activity, the supermodel wannabe, the sorority/fraternity types. The women are generally really skinny and not all that muscular. They are concerned with thinness.” (Jill)

“Usually shorts or sweats with something written across the butt, and Nike shoes. More brands than the male counterpart.” (Karl)

“No make-up and shorts that go lower than the crotch. She will have her hair pulled back and focus on her exercise not talking with others.” (Buck)

“Tan, hair pulled back with multiple hairbands, nice athletic shoes, gym shorts, headband, water bottle, iPod on arm, t-shirt from some athletic championship the person already won.” (Roxanne)

“She is focused on whatever activity she is actively engaged in, she’s dressed comfortably and not for show (i.e. if her hair is long it’s tied back, she doesn’t look like she did her make-up just to work out, wearing a lot of jewelry), she’s potentially sweaty.” (Ruby)

Although there is certainly a continued reverence for this re-creating female body, she represents an ideal type that according to the respondents was as mythical (and likely as exaggerated) as the ‘bad’ elliptical girl with the make-up on.

My point in arguing this perspective is that while there tended to be totally negative opinions of the meatheads or beefcakes in the weight room, and a reverence for a genderless toned body, women were disciplined by my respondents gaze as falling into two types of categories both of which greatly resemble the other as mirrored twins. In one instance, the highly disciplined fit female focused *just enough* on her activity represented something admirable, while on the other, the highly disciplined fit female focused *too much or not enough* on her activity represented something to critique. The key feature
here is in the way she has dressed for her performance. All of my respondents across the board tended to criticize women who were too visible (e.g. talking, wearing make-up, wearing the wrong outfit) while praising women who minimized their femininity (e.g. pulling their hair back, sweating, athletic outfit).

There is something to be said for how this reflects, in its way, an attack on established norms of female bodily appearance, but rather than ringing the bell of transgression and resistance, this re-creating Janus is neither looking forward nor backward. There is no transition towards a new appreciation for her gendered qualities. Instead, she is locked in stasis caught between two different types of expectations. That is to say, the respondents are not admiring her for ability to transgress the gender boundaries (as evidenced in their discussion of the genderless toned body), but rather they are expecting her to forsake her ability to perform her gender by disciplining her body in a socially acceptable way. Whereas the female body-builder demonstrates a taking up of a different gender performance, takes on the task of re-creating a different body, the cardio-using-woman (with both her faces) is confined to being reduced to nothing more than a body in-motion locked into the disciplinary mechanisms of perpetual re-creation until her body is reduced, purged and made pure.

**Motivating (E)motion and That “Something” Other than Discipline**

I don’t mean to single “women” out as an excluded category here, or to reify gender as always being a concrete distinction. Nor do I intend that either disciplinary or patriarchy are totalizing forces, rather I simply want to make clear that in my
observations and in my interviewees’ responses, the cardio-using-women are a clearly defined subculture that seems to be one of the most excluded in fitness. I have tried to illustrate this point because as I close out this discussion, I want to interrogate Crossley’s (2006) argument that participation in a fitness or recreation environment is actually more accessible than one imagines. Simply put, people are motivated by a wide variety of personal and social factors, and are not simply automatons responding to discursive constructions of gender, age and ability. Of this, I have no doubts, but I have tried to make clear how important self-discipline, gender performance and social relations are to place-making and re-creating bodies.

When asked about their reasons for participating in fitness and recreation, most common responses fell into two major categories: health and appearance. However, the primary link behind these two motives was the idea of having a moving body. Outside of social interaction (which has been previously discussed in context of teamwork), it seems that my respondents felt like it was important to just be active:

“It gets you moving. I know I should say something like a healthy lifestyle, which I agree with completely, but for me it just gives me something to do that doesn’t involve a couch. Don’t get me wrong, I think that living healthy is important and physical activity is a part of that. I just think there is something about moving around in general, not being stuck in one spot and one attitude all the time.” (Jill)

“Health. It’s good for your body to move around and burn off calories.” (Lois)

The concept of motion, or movement, as discussed in the context of Tuan, implied that it disrupted place; space is the freedom to move, while place is pause. In humanist thinking, place has been linked to the concepts of home, rest, emotion and otherwise symbolic meaning, but from my own experience, and echoed in the experiences of my interview
subjects, there is something significant about the ability to have an (e)motive body. The freedom to move is what creates the emotional spaces that allow for re-creating bodies to transgress the disciplinary power embedded in the social relations of the Rec.

Feminist art and film scholar Giuliana Bruno (2007) argues that emotion is not something one thinks; rather it is something one feels physically. There is a ‘motion of emotion’ (8). There is an underlying geography of art, sense and sensation in the development of architecture, she suggests, just as there is with the moving images of film, a painting or a map. The haptic experience of space – the ability to touch and be touched, the ability to affect and be affected, by moving or being moved allows for a political remaking of disciplined space into an intimate space of relaxation. She argues that while art can be measured and quantified (as it is in the right angles, lines and segments of architectural space); emotion is a “force that can confound even scientific disciplining” (260). In other words, the motion of emotion is an internal force that motivates people to be physically active and emerges from being physically active. In this way my interviewees for a moment seemed to suggest that re-creation can be a transgressive activity in the politics of place. When asked why they enjoy being active, they unanimously responded:

“Becoming/staying healthy, then stress relief. Finally, accomplishing goals and feeling good about yourself.” (Karl)

“To feel better about yourself. If you feel good during/after activity, good for you. That’s what should be the most important.” (Buck)

“I do physical activity to feel healthy and to be well.” (Roxanne)
Being physically active is not only about feeling healthy, but being mentally well – about having a different state of mind:

“It’s a great benefit and can at times be the focus but it is not the only or most important reason to be active. There is a mental health aspect to being active just as much as physical.” (Buck)

“I do, 100%, participate in physical activity to be healthy or maintain health, because for me ‘physical activity’ translates into working out. I always feel much healthier – even if it’s just a state of mind.” (Ruby)

Part of feeling better mentally and physically seemed to be the idea of having fun, which was also a prominent theme in their discussion of why people in general are physically active:

“I participate in sports mostly for fun, but I have the added effect of sports being healthy. […] Whenever I work out or play sports, I do feel a lot healthier.” (Lois)

“Yes to some extent I do participate in physical activity to be healthy. […] Going [to the gym] makes me feel healthy when I can’t do the things that I would rather do. […] When I can do activities I enjoy, I do not feel like I am doing them to be healthy, I feel like I am doing them to have fun.” (Jill)

“Fun. Enjoy it. Life is too short to push through just because you ‘have’ to.” (Buck)

When abstracting the discussion of fitness and re-creation from the actual spaces of the Rec, my respondents seemed to feel that physical activity carried with it this transgressive spirit. It was fun, it made them feel better and it was relaxing. But when talking about their desire for a healthy body and for better performance, the specter of discipline remained:

“I do actually enjoy the feeling I get after completing a workout or seeing the effects of steady workouts. But, in order to keep going through the pain, I have to keep the idea of a ‘healthy body’ in mind.” (Ruby)
“Sure, when I leave I feel better about myself because I’m making efforts to improve but at what cost? I would like to be more physically fit and strong. I would like to be able to play sports at a higher level than I currently can. I would also like to drop some fat and replace it with muscle. I would like to be able to run and it’s hard to be fast when you are overweight.” (Lois)

“I’m not going to participate in something if I am not healthy enough to do so. I haven’t played soccer in over a year because I don’t feel like I am healthy enough. If I can strengthen my leg and increase my stamina through other activities, I hope to return to that sport.” (Karl)

Not only did my respondents feel pressure to meet a certain ideal ‘healthy’ body, they recognized how bound up physical activity is in their desire for an ‘attractive’ body.

When asked about their appearance, they said:

“I have a hard time separating my appearance from my health at this point in my life. There was a time when I would have said that my appearance was the most important aspect of my decision to participate in physical activity […] But, right now I know what a healthy body feels like that is also physically attractive and I know what an unhealthy body feels like that is basically physically attractive – and I would rather have a healthy body. But, being self-conscious and with low self-esteem certainly positions outward appearance very high on my list of motivations to work out.” (Ruby)

“It is hard to change appearance without participating in physical activity.” (Karl)

“My appearance is moderately important to whether or not I am active. […] I feel like there is a surge from around November through March where I exercise and I am concerned about how I look and then it sort of dies down as I start to do activities on a more consistent basis without forcing myself to. Maybe it does relate to the gym… I never really thought about it, but that’s sort of the same time frame that I go to the Rec on a regular basis. Maybe I feel more serious or more health or appearance conscious because I go there.” (Jill)

Maybe. This seems to me the best way to conclude my analysis of the Rec. As with all places, it is one of confusing/confused motives and politics. At times I have been convinced, and for the most part remain so, that the Rec in its fundamental construction as a fitness center or gymnasium a place where bodies are disciplined through a process...
of re-creation. However, my own experiences exercising, the responses of my interviewees and the rare times I witnessed blatant transgression of the social boundaries of the Rec have convinced me that it is not as structured as it may seem. Maybe it is a place that simply reinforces negative perceptions of the self and of the body, but maybe it is also a place where the body can play, perform and re-create in ways that opens individuals up to a greater sense of (e)motion. Maybe.

**Conclusion**

Robert Frost argues that the motion of emotion is not only transformative of the body, but it is transformative of thought and the structure of discourse at the level of linguistic syntax. However, this emotion has to be tempered by discipline in order for emotional meaning to be communicated. He likens pure emotion to free verse poetry and to playing tennis without a net – neither of which makes sense without some structure.

Frost (1995, [1951]) comments that:

> “Emotion emoves a word from its base for the moment by metaphor, but often in the long run on to a new base. The institution, the form, the word, have regularly or irregularly to be renewed from the root of the spirit. That is the creed of the true radical. Emotions must be damned back and harnessed by discipline to the wit mill, not just turned loose in exclamations. No force will express far that isn’t shut in by discipline at all the pores to jet at one outlet only. Emotion has been known to ooze off.”

Frost’s poetry, like the Rec, is bound up in a double-becoming from the same to different to the same again. That is from being disciplined to being affective. Places, bodies and experiences are only legible to us – able to affect us – if they are presented in meaningful ways whether through architectural design or identity performance, for instance. This
does not mean that discipline and structure is always a necessity or needs to be totally strict. How would people know what they have in common if there wasn’t something presented to them that allowed them to be different? For example, transgressive performances wouldn’t be possible if bodybuilding culture didn’t socially exist and create bodies and places with which to interact. The obvious response to this statement is that if gender was not a salient discursive function in society then exclusionary practices wouldn’t limit women from bodybuilding in the first place and there would be no need for transgression. The question of whether difference is natural or not remains for continued debate.

While I do think my analysis tends to reflect the important role disciplinary power, capitalism and patriarchy play in segregating populations and reinforcing negative stereotypes, I have to believe that the alternative motives of emotion and a general sense of feeling good means these structures, or forces, are not as powerful as they seem. Because of this I have presented a narrative that skirts the line of critical humanism which argues there is more agency to people’s individual place-making and re-creative activities which is in line with John Bale’s contributions to sports geography. However, I have also shown fairly convincingly that Foucault’s notion of discipline reflects more accurately the types of spaces and bodies that are produced in the practice of re-creation which is in line with critical studies of fitness.

What I like about couching my discussion of critical sports geographies in the discourse of critical humanism is the way that – when analyzed at the philosophical level – it condemns the creation of the human being as a subject on which power is enacted,
but it also wants to rescue the human – the common substance, or whatever we are – that is being repressed. Halliwell and Mousely (2003) argue that Foucault can be considered a ‘technological humanist’ linked to social theorists like Donna Harraway (1991) whose concept of the cyborg presents this exact problem of being disciplined by technology that controls us but also gives us the opportunity to be something more. Noonan (2003: 33) makes a more emotional appeal stating that if disciplinary society really is a total institution, that it is normalizing and produces all of our motives then how can we ever transgress (or re-create anything new): “If everything about us is the product of disciplinary power, including the belief that we are free or could become free beings, then there is no ground from which resistance to the effects of power could be marshaled.” While I think this may be a gross exaggeration of Foucault’s argument, and is an oft levied critique at many postmodern or poststructural theories, I think it sums up nicely the need to recognize that there are forces that work to produce reality, but they are not impossible to resist. In the case of the Rec and of fitness-in-place, in general, self-discipline is a dominating force, but the power and practice of place-making and re-creating is one of becoming and remains contentious and contested.
Chapter 6

Conclusion: If You Start Running a Race, You Had Better Finish It – or, Find a Shortcut

Summary

Initially, I drew upon personal experience and my background in a variety of research sub-fields of geography to develop a project on the socio-spatial exclusion of college-age individuals at the Kent State University Student Recreation and Wellness Center. Aside from this ridiculous title, the project has been overwhelmingly altered since going ‘into the field’ and coming back again. Not only did I have to drastically change my methodologies and reorient my research questions, but the conclusions I found made me rethink my position. While the project was framed in the discussion of youth geographies, there was no evidence that age played a major role in exclusion. Similarly, while I had planned a more nuanced discussion of ‘play’ and ‘performance’ in my analysis, my participants seemed to reject these as categories in favor of ‘fun’ or ‘goals’. While conceptually similar, they lacked a certain theoretical congruity with the way I had thought them. In this way, the actual lived experiences at the Rec of other people turned out to be more contradictory than I expected.

I had hoped that I would have seen a little more transgression during my observations, and I had also hoped that people would have been a little more optimistic in their assessment of re-creating bodies. Fortunately for me, my idealism was put to bed so to speak by the truth on the ground. As it turned out, I had the entire conceptualization
figured out in reverse. My observations for the most part were benign and demonstrated an almost nonchalance towards gendered participation whereas my interviews with casual users of the Rec turned out to demonstrate how exclusion actually played out in the discursive construction of the Rec.

What I have tried to argue consistently throughout the thesis, however, is that sports should not be dismissed as a subject of geography, but is rather something that goes hand in hand. As people play sports, perform fitness or re-create their bodies, so do they re-create the places they inhabit. And this is a messy affair. Like all cultural phenomena, sports (and the variations within) are embedded in the production of social reality and one cannot simply substitute the study of football, as an example, for exercising because the social relations that contribute to their performance while interconnected are deeply different. Through a discussion of social theory and a review of scholarly research, I have tried to illustrate that one of the areas where John Bale’s theoretical contributions to sports geography is sorely missing is in critical geographies of fitness which invoke a less complicated discussion of geography in favor of referring to space as an abstract container or a ‘thing’ that only exists in our minds – in other words it lacks a certain materiality.

I don’t think in my own rendering of the fitness center that I have necessarily done a good job of providing a discussion of the material quality of space/place either. What I have done is to show that disciplinary power manifests itself both discursively in the social reality it produces (i.e. the way people talk about fit bodies), but also in the way it physically (read: materially) produces these bodies by connecting them to machines.
The most prominent example is in the way that the cardio-using-women and their re-creating bodies actually became ‘cardio machines’. Despite the evidence to support the pervasiveness of disciplinary power, it was with a certain uneasiness that I read through the other motive my respondents had for working out. There was to refer back to Frost, too much ‘emotion oozing off’ – that is, disciplinary mechanisms could not entirely account for why people enjoyed being physically active. It is here that I want to ultimately conclude by discussing what I see as an avenue for further developing this project.

**Deleuze, healthy bodies, and the becoming ‘fit’**

While I spend a significant amount of time focusing on how Foucault understands discipline, I don’t consider his wider body of work – specifically his pieces on sexuality. Furthermore, I wanted to expand my discussion of post-structuralism to include theorist Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. This would have been an enormous task. However, in the discussion of Deleuze, I am especially unhappy that I did not have the chance to consider Foucault as a ‘conceptual persona’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) through which Deleuze contextualizes his own work (Deleuze 1988).

Despite this, I think that Deleuze provides the best step forward for understanding the re-creating body in the context of geography because his theories on bodies, space and identity help close the theoretical gap between critical humanism’s emphasis on structure/agency and post-structural critiques of being. In this way, I think that my project could be continued by ‘becoming deleuzian’ – a concept to which I have briefly referred.
Not only that, but Deleuze’s ideas about ‘becoming’ has strongly influenced my personal thoughts over the past several years and can be seen throughout this thesis. Without being long-winded, I would like to offer a brief discussion of his work here.

“Becoming-deleuzian […] means liberating the blockage in oneself” suggests Brian Massumi (1996) which implies an opening up of thought. It means rather than thinking about distinctions between the self and the other as I have suggested in the previous chapter, we should be thinking about how we are always in a process of becoming the same and then becoming the other; “[b]ecoming is always double, and it is the double becoming that constitutes the people to come and the new earth” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 109). In thinking of becoming, we should not accept material realities as they appear or discursive constructions and representations, instead we need to think about how belonging is a real matter of “intensity, sensation or affect” (Grosz 2008) which is created by the coming together of bodies. Bodies in the Deleuzian sense are not limited to living things as with feminist thinking; instead, a body is anything with the potential to become, to connect with some other body. For example, places and people are both bodies and the intensity of their connection is what determines the health of the ‘machine’ created by their interactions. “Machines are not mechanisms; they evolve, mutate, and reconnect with different machines, which are themselves in evolution and mutation” (May 2005: 124). The question becomes then, how does thinking through Deleuze help understand geography and more specifically sports geography?

First and foremost, Deleuze’s philosophy of becoming helps us to understand and appreciate difference in a context not explained through ‘the politics of difference’ of the
more dominant philosophies of a poststructural analysis. It offers an explanation of the multiplicities that do not fit into institutional trajectories. For example, whereas Foucault is interested in tracing histories of difference and oppression which I demonstrate through my observational and interview analyses, Deleuze focuses on how ‘things’ are on an emergent trajectory that is never the same as it was before. Therefore, for Deleuze, difference is always present. It could be claimed that while Foucault is anti-ontological (or at least opposed to the dominant ontology), Deleuze is interested in the emergence of other ontologies. Deleuze thinks in reverse of the typical self/other, identity/difference binary (Hardt 1993). In Deleuzian thinking, everything begins with difference and it is identities which seek to stabilize in space/time but are forced ultimately to deterritorialize and then reterritorialize into something else.

Secondly, if we accept that everything begins with difference then belonging is not a function of being the same or being different, but is instead about becoming through the fitting together of bodies. With that in mind, I believe in the analysis of chapter five through the responses of the individuals that I interviewed that space is not only contextual and multiple but that it is equally real for different people in different ways in their ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey 2005). In that sense, I could explore how the empirical ‘realities’ of my observations both coincide with and break away from the actual experiences of my interviewees and explain what affect that has on the ‘truth’ of my research. Furthermore, working through different geographical perspectives in Deleuzo-Guattarian thought, it would be interesting to expand on Bale’s (2003a) work in general, wider sports geographical literature, and the idea of the ‘re-creation’ of healthy,
fit bodies in terms of the becoming of de-creation (deterritorializing). For now, I will have to settle for being finished.
References


Appendix A
INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM
Dept of Geography
Kent State University

Project Title: The socio-spatial exclusion of ‘college-age’ individuals and the construction and performance of their sex and gender: A case study of the Kent State University Recreation and Wellness Center

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview stage of my research. You will be asked a series of specific questions about your experiences with the Kent State University Recreation and Wellness Center. You can feel free to volunteer as much or as little information in response to these questions as you would like. Your responses will determine the length of the interviews though they should not last any longer than you are comfortable participating. During the interview, I will be audio-taping our conversation in order to allow me to transcribe it at a later date. You will be asked to sign a consent form agreeing to be audio-taped.

Confidentiality will be maintained to the limits of the law. Confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate that you may do harm to yourself or may do/have done harm to others.

The information you provide during this interview and any other interviews for this research will be kept in the Dept of Geography in 413 McGilvrey Hall on the campus of Kent State University under the supervision of myself and my advisor, Dr. Shawn Banasick.

If you take part in this project you will be helping greatly with my research. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to do it. If you do take part, you may stop at any time.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call me, Don Colley, at (937) 408-4249 or the Kent State University Department of Geography at (330) 672-2045. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University's rules for research, please call Dr. John West, Vice President of Research, Division of Research and Graduate Studies (Tel. 330.672.2704).

You will get a copy of this consent form.
Sincerely,
Don Colley, MA Candidate
Dept of Geography, Kent State University

CONSENT STATEMENT(S)
I agree to take part in this project. I know what I will have to do and that I can stop at any time.

__________________________________________  ___________________________
Signature of Participant                      Date

__________________________________________  ___________________________
Signature of Researcher                       Date

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Appendix B

Original Interview Questionnaire Drafts

Part I:

*Questionnaire:* Thank you for your time; your help is invaluable to my research. This should not take more than 5-10 minutes. Your information will be kept confidential and anonymous.

1) What is your age _____?

2) What range of ages (example: age X to Y) do you feel make up your age group?

__________________________________________

3) How would you label, classify or name your age group?

__________________________________________

4) In your opinion, what are some general attributes associated with your age group?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5) On a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being childhood and 7 being adulthood) where would you rank your age group?

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7

6) Why would you rank your age group this way?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

7) What is your sex?  Female _____  Male _____

8) In your opinion, what are some general attributes associated with the same sex?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

9) How would you describe someone of the same sex who did not exhibit these attributes?

________________________________________________________________________
10) In your opinion, what are some general attributes associated with the opposite sex?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

11) How would you describe someone of the opposite sex who did not exhibit these attributes?
________________________________________________________________________

12) How often do you exercise or engage in sports and recreation activities?
________________________________________________________________________

13) Which types of exercise, sports and recreation activities do you prefer?
________________________________________________________________________

14) Do you ever feel uncomfortable participating in certain types of exercise, sports and recreation activities? When, where and why?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Scenarios:

1) Joe Cool is an average 18 year old male college student. He typically attends the university recreation and wellness center about five days a week. When he goes, he usually takes some friends. When he goes to the recreation and wellness center...

Please rank the following behaviors on how likely or unlikely Joe is to participate:
1 – very unlikely; 2 – unlikely; 3 – neither likely nor unlikely; 4 – likely; 5 – very likely

A) He likes to lift weights regularly: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
B) He likes to use cardio equipment regularly: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
C) He likes to work out with the same sex: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
D) He likes to work out with the opposite sex: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
E) He likes to work out with those in his age group: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

What other activities might Joe like to participate in at the recreation and wellness center?
2) Jane Cool is an average 18 year old female college student. She typically attends the university recreation and wellness center about five days a week. When she goes, she usually takes some friends. When she goes to the recreation and wellness center...

Please rank the following behaviors on how likely or unlikely Jane is to participate:
1 – very unlikely; 2 – unlikely; 3 – neither likely nor unlikely; 4 – likely; 5 – very likely

A) She likes to lift weights regularly: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
B) She likes to use cardio equipment regularly: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
C) She likes to work out with the same sex: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
D) She likes to work out with the opposite sex: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
E) She likes to work out with those in her age group: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

What other activities might Jane like to participate in at the recreation and wellness center?

________________________________________________________________________

Would you like to participate in an interview or focus group to further discuss my research? Your continued help would be very much appreciated! If so, please provide your first name and email address.

Name: ____________________________________________

Email: ____________________________________________
Part II:

**Questionnaire:** This should not take more than 5-10 minutes. Thank you for your time; your help is invaluable to my research. Please fill this out to the best of your ability and be as honest as you possible. Your information will be kept confidential and anonymous.

1) What is your age:  17 or younger □ / 18□ / 19 □ / 20□ / 21 □ / 22□ / 23 □ / 24 or older □

2) Please provide an age range for each of the following groups (e.g. Baby 1-2 years):
   - Children
   - Pre-teens
   - Teenagers
   - Junior high students
   - College students
   - Young Adults
   - Adolescents
   - Adults
   - High school students
   - Graduate students

3) What range of ages (example: age X to Y) do you feel make up your age group? ________________

4) How would you label, classify or name your age group? ________________________________

5) In your opinion, what are some general attributes associated with your age group?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

6) What is your sex?  Female _____  Male _____

7) In your opinion, what are some general attributes associated with the female sex?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

8) How would you describe someone of the female sex who did not exhibit these attributes, in terms of...
   - Her clothing: ____________________________________________
   - Her demeanor: _________________________________________
   - Her performance: _______________________________________
Appendix C

Updated Semi-structured Interview Form

Survey/Interview: Thanks for your time; your help is invaluable to my research. This can take anywhere between 15-60+ minutes depending on how in-depth you answer each question. Please take the time to answer each question in as much detail as possible. If you would like to print this and return it to me, I have provided area for your responses but feel free to complete this digitally and add as much space as necessary to give a full answer. Your information will be kept confidential.

Status Information:

1) What is your age? ______
2) What is your sex? __________
3) What is your name? __________________
4) What is your student status (e.g. graduate, undergraduate, non-attending, etc.)? ______________
5) Please choose an alternative name for yourself that I may use when presenting your answers to this interview:
   _______________________________________________________

Questions:

1) How important do you see physical activity (e.g. sport, recreation, exercise, fitness, etc.)? How do you ‘really’ feel as opposed to how you think you should feel?

2) What is the history of your physical activity?
3) How often do you participate in physical activities now? What types of activities do you prefer? Why?

4) How would you describe your activity in terms of serious sport, basic recreation or exercise-fitness? That is, do you feel like the types of activities you do fit better into one category or another? Is there a better description than the categories mentioned?

5) Do you feel like you take the activities seriously or do you participate for some other purpose than fitness? Why?

6) Do you feel like your performance (e.g. accomplishments, goals) matter? What matters most? Why?

7) With whom do you generally participate in activities? Why?
8) What types of people do you feel more comfortable being around when participating in physical activity? Why?

9) Are there types of people that make you feel uncomfortable? Why?

10) How would you describe your body type? How would you rate your activity level?

11) Do you ever (or have you ever) gone to the Kent State University Recreation and Wellness Center? How often and for what purposes? What types of activities do you participate in when at the Rec’?

12) When you’re at the Rec’ does your self-image (i.e. the description of your body/activity level) change? Is there anywhere in particular at the Rec’ that makes you feel especially uncomfortable? Why?
13) Where in the Rec’ do you feel the most comfortable? Do you feel more comfortable being around others? Why?

14) Do you feel that certain behaviors are expected of you in certain places of the Rec’? Where? What types of behaviors?

15) Does this cause you to avoid these areas? Why?

16) Do you feel certain body types/images are expected in certain places of the Rec’? Where? What types of bodies/people?

17) Do you feel like your sex/gender requires you to participate in some activities as opposed to others? Does this limit where or how you participate at the Rec’?
18) Do you feel like other ‘parts’ of your identity require and/or limit your participation in certain activities? Does this limit where or how you perform activities at the Rec”?

19) Do you feel like physical activity is taken too seriously by others? In your opinion, what types of people are most serious about physical activity at the Rec”?

20) Who seems the least serious? Why?

21) What kinds of body types/images demonstrate a person’s serious attitude towards physical activity? Does this vary across gender? Does this vary across other ‘parts’ of an individual’s identity? How? Why?

22) At the Rec’, what does a female who takes physical activity seriously look like?
23) At the Rec’, what does a male who takes physical activity seriously look like?

24) Should physical activity be taken seriously and be performance oriented? What types of activities are the most serious? What makes them serious? Where do these activities take place?

25) What types of activities are the least serious? Why? Where do these activities take place?

26) What’s the most important reason for physical activity? Why?

27) Should physical activity be fun or be focused on playing games rather than performing seriously? Why?
28) Does the Rec’ offer a lot of opportunities to have ‘fun’? What types of activities are the most fun? What makes them fun?

29) In your opinion, where in the Rec’ do the most fun activities take place? Why?

30) Do you ever feel compelled to participate in a certain activity because others ‘like’ you are participating in the activity? What types of activities? Why do you feel compelled?

31) Does this limit your ability to have fun or take the activity seriously? How? Why?

32) What activities are the most fun but also feel the most serious to you? Why?
33) How would you describe your participation in physical activity in relation to your health? Do you participate in physical activity to be healthy? Does your participation make you feel healthy? What activities make you feel the healthiest?

34) How important is health to your decision to participate in physical activity? Why?

35) How important is your appearance to your decision to participate in physical activity? Why?

36) What types of bodies appear to be the healthiest? Why?

37) What types of bodies appear to be the most attractive? Why?
38) What types of physical activities relate more closely to a healthy body? Why?

39) What types of physical activities relate more closely with an attractive body? Why?